THE ART OF PLAY

BOARD AND CARD GAMES OF INDIA

edited by
Andrew Topsfield

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The playing and enjoyment of games, whether physical or sedentary, is a fundamental human activity found in almost every society. From earliest times, successful games have travelled freely between different regions of the world, and individual games often have lengthy and complex cultural histories of their own. Several of the world's major board games were first conceived in the Indian subcontinent: not least chess, still the most globally popular board game, as well as games such as Ludo (or Pachisi) and Snakes and Ladders which, in simplified forms, are nowadays played mainly by children.

Gaming with dice and the playing of board games have had a major role in Indian culture since at least the 3rd millennium BCE, as shown by archaeological finds and early literary references in the *Rig Veda, Mahabharata* and other texts. Numerous game boards, pieces, dice, and playing cards also still survive, though for the most part only from the late Mughal and British periods (c. 1700–1950). Many of these were made for courtly or wealthy patrons and are often very finely carved, painted, inlaid, or otherwise decorated. However those used by the common people can also reveal a highly vigorous and colourful sense of design.

Over the ages, India has indeed shown a greater creativity than probably any other part of the world in the range and quality of its games, whether of chance or skill, and of its games-related artefacts. A natural flair for gaming, allied to brilliant aptitudes for artistic design, mathematics, and intellectual or metaphysical inquiry, have all played their part in this.

Although many scattered articles on this rich and fascinating subject have appeared over the last century or more, no general survey book on Indian games in their cultural and artistic aspects has been attempted hitherto. The present book, with its eleven wide-ranging articles written by leading authorities, deals with various aspects of the great traditional games of the Indian subcontinent. It is richly illustrated with examples of original game boards, pieces, and playing cards from museum and private collections, and with paintings and sculptures showing games being played.

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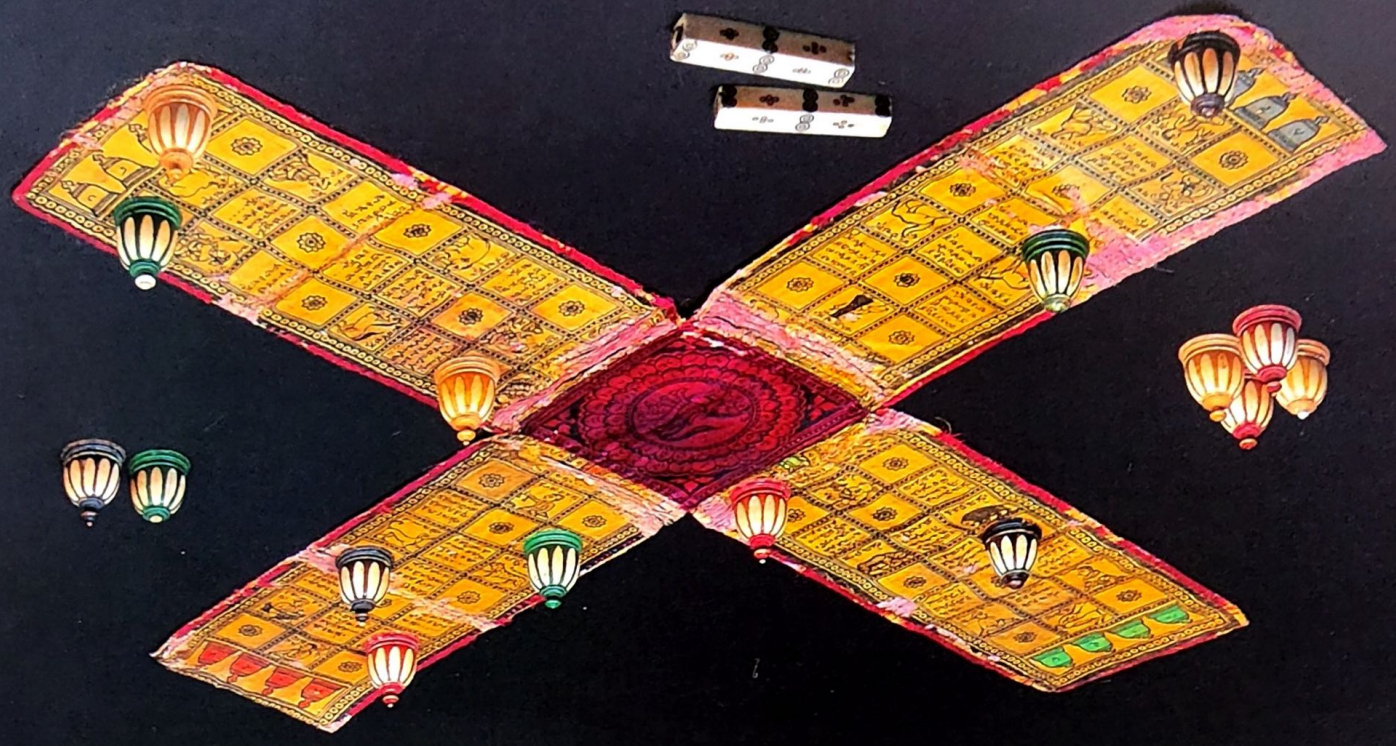

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Captions to preliminary pages:
Page 1: Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar's hybrid karmic game of chaupar or pachisi, with inscribed playing squares. Mysore, c. 1850. Block-printed on silk. Private collection.
Pages 2–3: German version of an English Snakes and Ladders board (see page 87), c. 1900–05. Printed card. Private collection, Germany. Photograph: Joachim Bautze.
Pages 4–5: Folding board for the karmic game of Shivasayujyam. Mysore, mid-19th century. Present location unknown (see page 159).
Pages 6–7: A selection of playing cards from Orissa, Sawantwadi, and Tanjore (see pages 94, 102–03).
Pages 8–9: Chess pieces from a Vishakhapatnam set (illustrated on page 138). Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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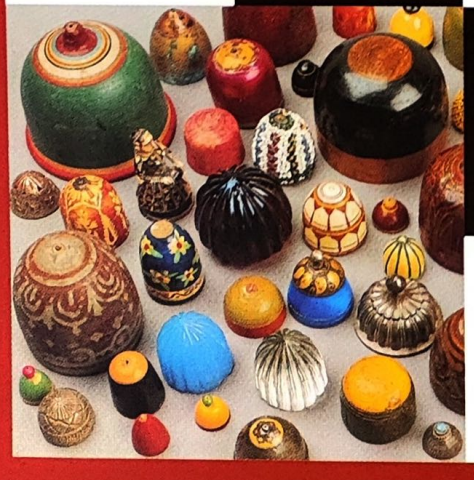


DICE, CHAUPAR, CHESS

INDIAN GAMES IN HISTORY, MYTH, POETRY, AND ART

ANDREW TOPSFIELD

On games in ancient India, a huge book could be written.

– Louis Renou[1]

Introduction

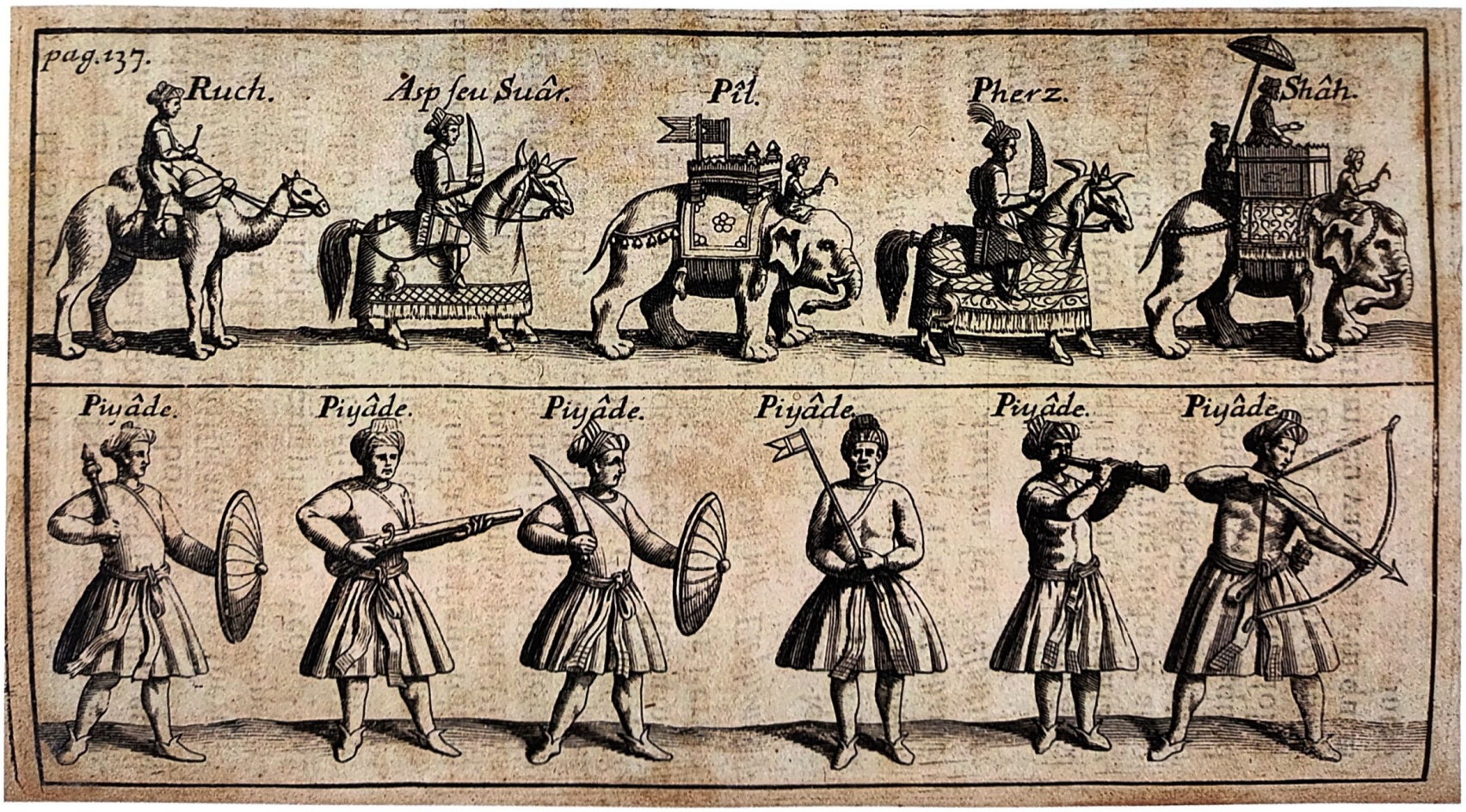
The scholarly study of Indian games began over three centuries ago with a rambling and now seldom read book in Latin, *De Ludis Orientalibus* (1694), by the Oxford Orientalist Thomas Hyde.[2] Among its many contributions to the knowledge of Eastern games, this pioneering work correctly identified the Indian origin of chess (figure 1). A century later, there followed Sir William Jones's essay "On the Indian Game of Chess" (1790), which made use of Sanskrit sources for the first time.[3] Even in the 19th and 20th centuries, Hyde's successors have been few in this somewhat neglected field of study, still regarded as marginal by some. The literature of Indian games therefore remains patchy and is found mainly in scattered articles and monographs. No comprehensive historical survey has yet been attempted (the task would indeed be immense), and the present book can hardly meet this need. But dealing with diverse aspects of Indian games and the artefacts they inspired, it may serve as an introduction to this fascinating and complex subject, which at times embraces the disciplines of archaeology, art history, anthropology, language and literature, mathematics, and political, social, and religious history.

Such studies are all the more urgent in that most traditional Indian games, after being transmitted orally for many generations, have died out or will soon do so. Game boards, pieces, and cards, moreover, have always been naturally ephemeral and vulnerable to destruction. Where now are the fine ganjifa cards of Akbar (1556–1605), painted by artists of his court? Unlike their earlier Safavid Persian counterparts,[4] no imperial Mughal playing cards now survive. Indeed, remarkably few examples of pre-1850 Indian games survive at all, compared to what once existed. We must hope that more may still gradually surface, around the subcontinent, from the obscurity of old family storage chests or forgotten godowns.

Indian games: art and meaning

Play is a basic element of human life and the playing of games is found in virtually every society in the world. A traditional game can be in itself a rich and authentic expression of a culture, while also giving rise to artefacts of great diversity and beauty, particularly at the higher social levels. In the last five millennia, the Indian subcontinent has shown greater creativity than probably any other part of the world in the range and quality of its games, whether of chance or skill, and of its games-related artefacts. A natural flair for gaming, allied to brilliant aptitudes for artistic design, mathematics, numerology, and intellectual or metaphysical inquiry, have all played their part in this. The play principle can indeed be seen as fundamental to Hindu thought, with its pervasive concepts of *maya* or illusion, the endless play of phenomena which constitutes our existence, and of *lila*, the divine creative play of Krishna or Shiva.

In daily life, at all levels of society from village to court, the playing of traditional games and contests constituted for both sexes a continuous experiential link between childhood and adulthood.[5] Playing games of increasing complexity from youth into maturity served not only as a diversion or pastime but as, in some sense, a mode of learning. At the most overt level, games themselves could mirror aspects of human life in an instructive way. The arrangement of the chess pieces originally reflected the disposition of the four sections (*chaturanga*) of an army in battle (elephants, cavalry, chariots, infantry). Thus it may once have helped to teach princes the arts of military strategy. Yet, as a profound and subtle game of strategy and tactics in the abstract, its appeal has proved universal. Chess is indeed one of India's most far-reaching and enduring contributions to world culture. Having conquered Europe via Persia and the Islamic world a thousand years ago, it still remains – in its modified European form of c. 1490 – the leading global board game of skill. Chess is only the most conspicuous and best documented[6] instance of an ancient, and still only imperfectly understood, traffic in popular board games between India, West Asia, Africa, and Europe in particular. Further examples of this constant process of

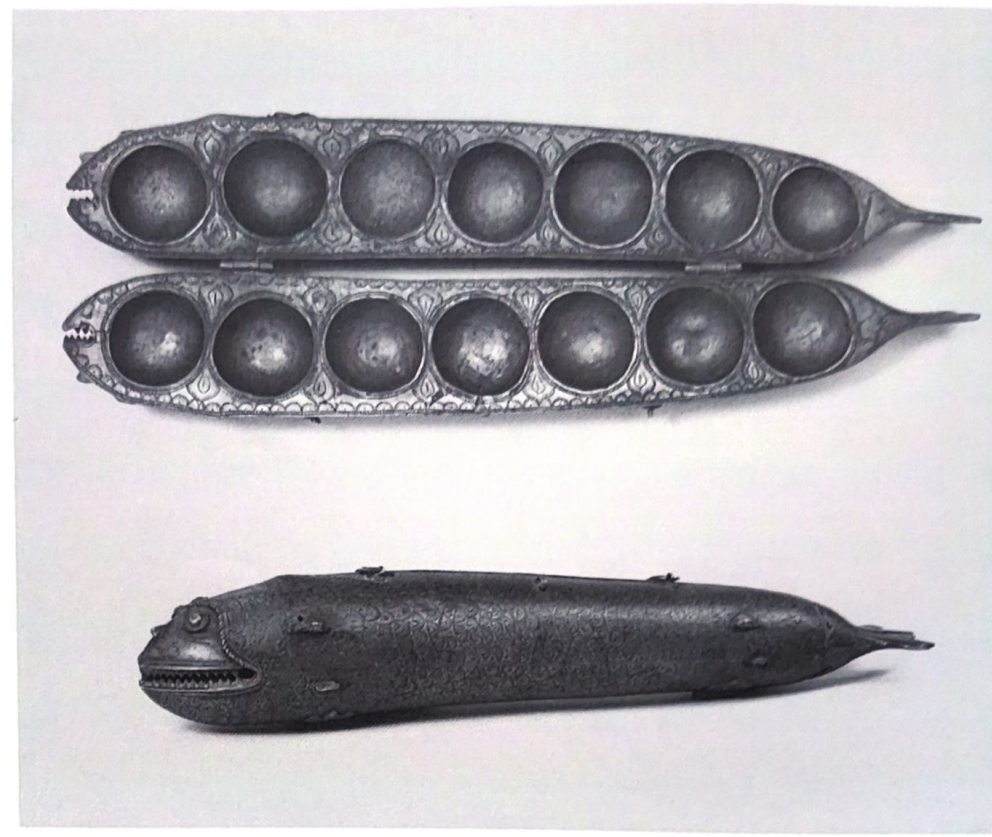


1. Pieces and pawns from an Indian chess set: illustration to Hyde's *De Ludis Orientalibus*, 1694, p. 137. Oriental Institute Library, Oxford.

ludic cultural exchange are touched on in other articles in this book.

Games which in themselves might appear culturally neutral in the form of their pieces and play could become endowed with complex overlays of mythological association or symbolic meaning, rather like the tendency in medieval Europe to view chess and other games in the light of religious, moral, social, or poetic allegory.[7] This occurred, for example, with the identification of backgammon (itself an ancient import from the Iranian region) with the dice game played between Shiva and Parvati described in Puranic myth, a subject frequently represented in sculpture at Ellora and elsewhere.[8] In modern times, similar stories of this divine marital contest, freighted with "themes of competitiveness, submission and sexuality",[9] are associated in the Tulunad region of southern Karnataka with the folklore of mancala, a highly popular and widespread computational board game of probable northeast African origin.[10] An elaborate 19th-century hinged bronze mancala (or *pallanguli*) board, made in the auspicious form of a fish, is seen in figure 2.[11]

Other traditional Indian games were overtly religious and didactic in conception or made prominent use of religious symbolism in their decoration. The versatile race game of gyan chaupar (Snakes and Ladders),[12] which became popular in Jain, Hindu, and Muslim versions, instructed its players in the paths of spiritual discipline and devotion by which they might surmount the snakes of karma or the lower passions, and so attain liberation or union with God. Further spiritual quest games based on karma theory (some of them adaptations of the game of chaupar) were devised by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar of Mysore (1799–1868), many of whose ingenious creations are moreover imbued with mythological and astrological symbolism: liberation and enlightenment were again the aim of the game. The spiral race game of ganj, closely related to the 16th-century European Game of Goose and for some time current in Mughal court circles, was unusual in India for its more secular pursuit of an earthly "treasure" (albeit of a symbolic, fairytale kind). The suits of Hindu ganjifa cards, finally, were also of a religious character, being commonly based on the ten avatars of Vishnu, or less often the *Ramayana* story and other themes. An attractively painted dashavatara set from Orissa, still with its original box, is seen in figures 3a–c: it was commissioned a century ago from the artist Vaishnava Mahapatra by the Raja of Parlakhemundi, for presentation to his schoolteacher Mr Cameron Morrison, who is depicted thrice on the box as a Sahib hunting tiger and waterfowl.[13]



2. Chased bronze *pallanguli* (mancala) board in the form of a fish (opened and closed). South India, 19th century. Length 42.5 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In the Indian subcontinent as elsewhere, people have no doubt always played games mainly for fun or for money. But from early times, when gaming was associated with divination, such play also had a significant role in religious ritual and the mystique of kingship. Within the last two millennia, the surviving record of Indian sculpture, painting, and the Sanskrit or vernacular literatures reveals how the imagery suggested by games – whether games of chance (dice or simple race games played

3a. Six cards from a Dashavatara ganjifa pack, of (l. to r.) the Parashurama (10), Vamana, Jagannatha, Balarama, Narasimha (4), and Rama suits. Made by Vaishnava Mahapatra at Parlakhemundi, Orissa, early 20th century. Cards: cotton tissue, painted and lacquered; diameter 9.6 cm. Private collection, Vermont, USA.

with dice), games of skill (chess above all), or a blend of both (backgammon and to a lesser extent chaupar) – has been expressively interpreted by Indian poets, sages, or artists. In the remainder of this essay I shall explore a few of these themes, in connection with three types of game which have been of preeminent cultural importance: dice, chaupar, and chess.

The die is cast: Dice and early race games

Dice play and gambling have been part of Indian life since earliest times. Quantities of dice, four-sided and (less often) six-sided, have been found in the cities of the Indus civilization (c. 2500–1750 BCE), as have gamesmen and the meagre but tantalizing remains of brick game boards.[14] The nature of the games played with these boards, pieces, and dice remains obscure, though tentative connections might perhaps be made with the earliest forms of backgammon (as found recently in southeastern Iran, from c. 2000 BCE),[15] or the even earlier Sumerian Royal Game of Ur (c. 2600 BCE; found in modern Iraq): a most enduring and well-travelled game, of which a version was until recently still played by Jews at Cochin in south India.[16]

The gaming impulse is indeed a constant element in human life. Extant ancient game pieces of the Indus civilization can appear remarkably similar in form to the domed, conical chaupar pieces of the Mughal and later periods. Similarly, a terracotta die reportedly found at Mohenjodaro (figure 4) is both cubic (an uncommon form later in India) and a rare example of such a die with opposite sides adding to seven as in modern Western dice. (It is numbered 1:6, 2:5, 3:4; more usual then was 1:2, 3:4, 5:6.)

The people of the Vedic culture that followed the Indus civilization in northwest India were familiar with gambling. At first they used small brown nuts called *vibhidaka* (or *vibhitaka*) as dice. A famous hymn from their earliest text, the *Rig Veda* (c. 1100 BCE or earlier) is known as the "Gamester's Lament". It begins:

> The dangling nuts, born where the wind blows the lofty tree,
> delight me with their rolling on the board.
> The cheering vibhidaka has brought me joy,
> like a draught of soma [intoxicant] from Mount Mujavant.[17]

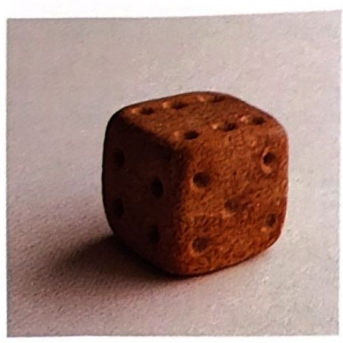
But the gambler then bemoans his loss of wife and wealth through his addiction.

Long rectangular stick dice also became popular and remained so into modern times. Their cultural importance at an early date is shown by the naming of the four *yugas* or world-ages of Hindu cosmology after this die's four scoring sides, called (in descending order from four to one) Krita, Treta, Dvapara, and Kali. In each recurrent world-cycle the Krita Yuga is a Golden Age, after

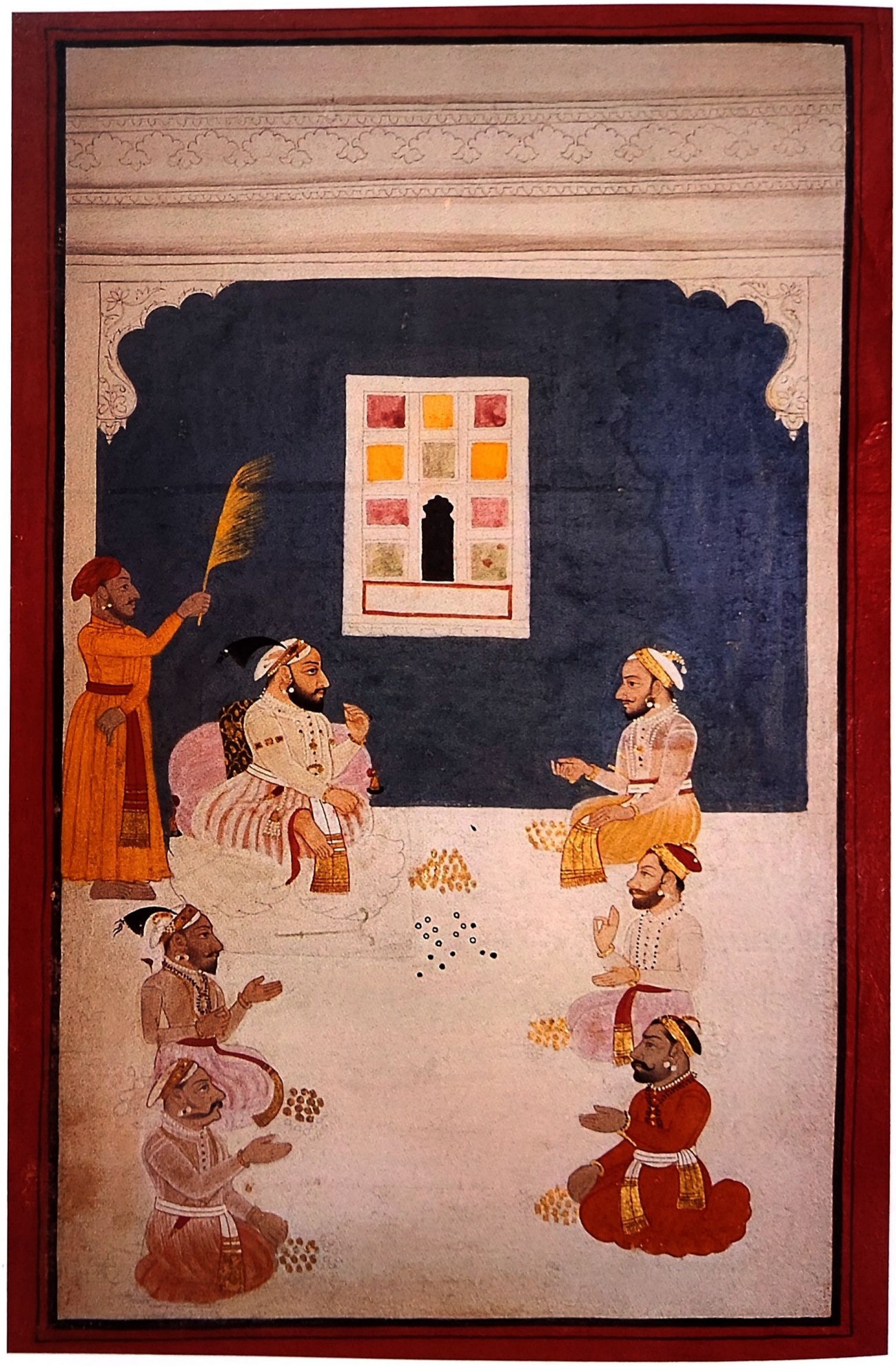
meaning of sides of dice ←

3b. Sliding lid to the ganjifa box for the pack in figure 3a, with depiction of Mr Morrison as a hunter and inscription identifying the artist Vaishnava Mahapatra, of Chitrakar ("Painters") Street, Parlakhemundi. Painted and lacquered wood.

3c. Side view of the same ganjifa box, showing Mr Morrison with attendant shooting a tiger; and a dark-skinned tribal hunter. Painted and lacquered wood; height 14.5 cm. Private collection, Vermont, USA.



4. Cubic terracotta die. Mohenjodaro, Indus Valley, c. 2000 BCE. 2 cm cube approx. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



5. Maharana Sangram Singh II of Mewar playing dice with cowries. Udaipur, c. 1720. Gouache on paper. Present location unknown.

6. Krishna and Radha gamble on Diwali night with stick dice. Guler, Punjab Hills, c. 1760–70. Gouache on paper. Museum Rietberg, Zurich (Collection Horst Metzger).

which a progressive degeneration sets in. The present Kali Yuga is an unhappy final age of decline, which will end with a great conflagration and one of the countless periodic dissolutions of the universe.

Strong associations arose between dice play and divination or religious ritual, as has been mentioned. Ritual playing of dice in a gaming hall attached to the palace, supervised by a special official in charge of the dice, formed part of the royal consecration ceremony. In this symbolic game the king always had to win. In more modern times, it has remained an auspicious custom in India to roll the dice in a game of chaupar at the festival of Diwali, and so foretell one's family or business fortunes for the coming year.[18]

Cowry shells also served as a common form of dice. In an 18th-century Udaipur painting (figure 5), Maharana Sangram Singh of Mewar (r. 1710–34) and his courtiers are playing a game with 16 cowries. These have just been thrown and have fallen slightly unevenly, in a 9:7 spread.[19] The king, as is often the case in such pictures,[20] seems to be winning the game as he has more stake money than the rest. While this royal game is evidently being conducted in an above-board manner, at some courts an entire etiquette of losing by guile or stealth against your ruler seems to have prevailed. The courtiers of the capricious Nasir ud-Din Haidar of Lucknow, around 1830, had to work especially hard at this. W. Knighton records, "The king I found, *must not be beaten...* There was little difficulty, comparatively speaking, in allowing the king to win the games of chess or draughts. He played at both, played badly, and always won."[21] Games at court might also be played for forfeits. Once when Maharaja Man Singh of Amber (r. 1592–1614) lost at dice to a Mughal minister, the Khankhanan, his mildly humiliating forfeit was to have to utter the cry of a cat.[22]

We know little about early dice games or board games played with dice. Race games of various kinds were presumably played on 5 x 5, 8 x 8 (*ashtapada*), 10 x 10, or other types of board, counterparts perhaps of modern games like the south Indian *thayyam*.[23] Skill at dice and related games is listed among the 64 polite arts enjoined on the cultivated urban man or courtesan in the *Kama Sutra* of Vatsyayana (3rd century CE). At the same time, such games were naturally condemned as time-wasting frivolities by ethical or legal texts such as the *Laws of Manu* and the Buddhist and Jain scriptures.

Catastrophic reversals of fortune occasioned by an addiction to gambling were a recurrent literary theme. The most famous instance occurs in the *Mahabharata* (c. 300 BCE–CE), when the virtuous Yudhishthira loses his kingdom and liberty, and that of his wife and brothers, to his wicked Kaurava cousin in a dice match. Elsewhere in the epic, Nala again carelessly gambles away his kingdom and has to retreat to the forest with his devoted Damayanti. Other instances appear in dramatic and poetic works of the Gupta and later ages.[24] The erotic mood (*shringara rasa*) also became associated with dicing and board game play, as in an elegant Sanskrit *subhashita* verse:

> My love and I play dice: the prize
> (Which one must lose) is that which lies
> Between her thighs.
> But either way, let Love proclaim,
> Which of us two has won the game?[25]

Or again:

> An embrace at first and then a loving kiss
> had been her losses in the gambling match.
> Now when her lover asks again for stakes
> she is silent, though the flesh upon her cheek
> rises with suppressed excitement, and her hand
> is sweating as she moves the piece.[26]

In the *Skanda Purana* (c. 700 or later) and other texts, Shiva and Parvati similarly play a dice game, charged with a certain sexual tension, which assumed a major mythological significance and is represented in sculptures at Ellora and elsewhere as a type of

backgammon.[27] Comparable themes appear at a much later date in Rajasthani and Pahari painting in illustrations of *nayakas* and *nayikas* (ideal poetic lovers) or the *Krishnalila*, as in a scene of Krishna and Radha playing for gold coins with three stick dice on a terrace on Diwali night, though also no doubt with an amorous end in view (figure 6).

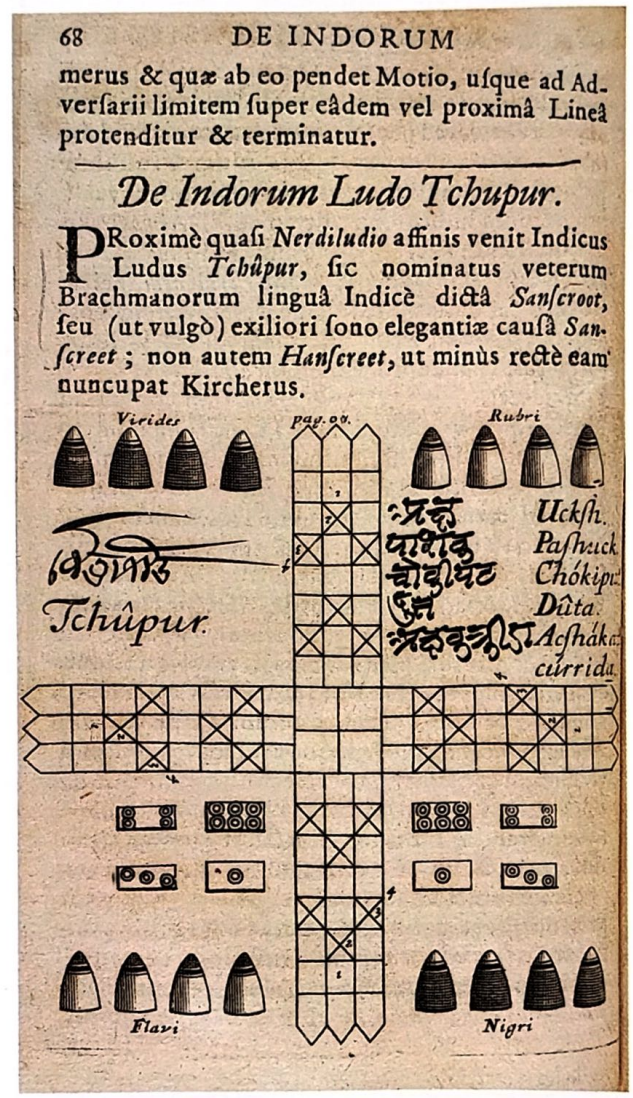
The game could also be treated as a metaphor for the transience and uncertainty of life. A famous poem of Bhartrihari (probably 4th/5th century CE) is freely translated here by Brough, with an echo of Edward Fitzgerald's 19th-century classic, the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*:

> The pieces move, now few, now more:
> Here many, where before was one,
> Here none, where many stood before.
> Time, with the goddess Death at play,
> Sits at the chequer-board and rolls
> Alternate dice of night and day,
> And takes the pieces: living souls
> Of all that dwell beneath the sun.[28]

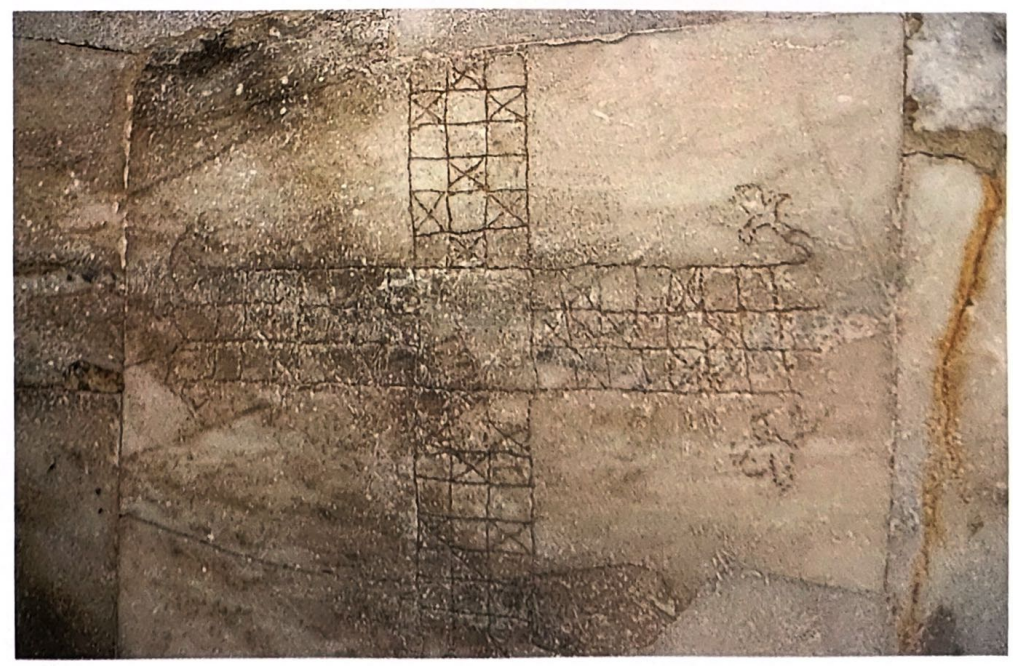
As always, we do not know what game was being played by Bhartrihari's fateful protagonists. But it was probably a race game, perhaps either backgammon or some prototype form of chaupar, the cruciform game which later displaced backgammon in general popularity.

Chaupar and the game of life

Chaupar or pachisi was one of the first Indian games to become known in the West in its authentic form, when Hyde discussed it in 1694 in his book on Oriental games (figure 7). Over a century before this, Abu'l Fazl, court historian to Akbar, had also described the game in his *'Ain-i Akbari* (c. 1565), observing that it was well established in north India by that time.[29] However no pre-Mughal boards are known to survive. The incised graffiti boards, commonly found in stone pavements at temples and other sites (figure 8), could be earlier in some cases, but it is rarely possible to date them exactly.[30] Most boards, then as now, would have been of ephemeral materials such as cloth, like the chaupar board over which the hero Laur confronts king Mahipat in a mid-16th-century illustration to the *Chandayana* romance (figure 9).[31] This is one of the earliest appearances of the game in painting: in later Rajasthani and Pahari painting chaupar scenes became quite frequent, both



7. Indian chaupar board with dice and 16 men (described as green, red, yellow, and black): illustration to Hyde's *De Ludis Orientalibus*, 1694, p. 68. Oriental Institute Library, Oxford.



8. Chaupar board of uncertain date, incised in paving at the Adinatha (Vimala Vasahi) Temple, Mount Abu, Rajasthan, 11th century and later. Photograph: A. Topsfield, 1982.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW
RUMINATIONS ON INDIAN CHESS

PRATAPADITYA PAL

> The chessboard is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe,
> the rules of the game are what we call the laws of nature.
> – Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95)[1]

When we were growing up we were discouraged from playing chess. I still remember a poem that we learnt that began with the following verse:

> "Do not play chess, my son
> Do not play chess."
> So said Dad
> As he rescued me
> From the Law's caress.[2]

The reason of course was the game's addictiveness that would have distracted us from our studies. This was only a reiteration of the general prohibition about gambling, the most extreme example of which was the game of dice in the great epic *Mahabharata* and its terrible consequences, a story that was familiar to me before I was ten. Although chess, known as *daba* in Bengali, did not involve gambling, nowhere has its obsessive nature been so graphically demonstrated as in a short story written by the Hindi writer Premchand (1880–1936) which was the basis of the engaging film called *The Chess Players* by the famous Indian film maker Satyajit Ray (1921–92). Inspired by the film, the contemporary Indian artist Maqbool Fida Husain (b. 1915) painted the picture illustrated here (figure 2).[3] The most recent cinematic effort to exploit the "maniacal" nature of the game is a short Pixar animated film, *Gerri's Game* (2006).

The original Hindi title of both Premchand's story and Ray's film is *Shatranj ke khilari*. In the Urdu-Hindi speaking world, the Arabic word *shatranj* is preferred to the Sanskrit *chaturanga*, which is still used generally in the south. The Bengalis, however, use the word *daba* derived from the Persian *dav*, one of whose meanings is "a stroke or move at play".[4] Some of the other expressions such as *kisti mat* etc. used by the Bengalis are also borrowed from the Persian. It is ironic that across northern India two foreign words should be used to denote a game of Indian origin.[5]

1. Chess set. Murshidabad/ Behrampur, West Bengal. Ivory pieces on modern chessboard. State Archaeological Museum, West Bengal. Photograph: Shiharan Nandy.

2. *Shatranj ke khilari* (The Chess Players), by Maqbool Fida Husain. Acrylic on canvas; 117.4 x 172.7 cm. Photograph courtesy of Sotheby's, New York.

The implication however is clear. The game probably gained in popularity after the establishment of Muslim rule on the subcontinent. It may not be a coincidence that prior to the 12th-century work *Manasollasa* by King Someshvara, no known Sanskrit text describes the game. However, that the game was known in India at least as early as the 6th century, is clear from Persian and Arabic literature.[6] One of the most detailed descriptions was by al-Biruni (b. 973) in his *Kitab al-Hind*.[7] It is not known whether his account of the four-handed chess played with a pair of dice was based on literature or on informants.

II

Today, of course, we are familiar with chess played by two players with no involvement of dice. But clearly at one time chess (or its precursor) was played in India as a game of chance, partly perhaps to quicken the pace and partly to satisfy the instinct for gambling. The memory of this still lingered in Indian society into the 20th century, as is clear from the verse quoted above (where the young aspiring chess master was rescued from the clutches of the Law), and from the kernel of Premchand's story set in the 19th-century Lucknow of the Nawabs, where two friends are so engrossed in the game of chess that they are unaware of the British takeover of their city.

Both in the East and the West, until the game acquired celebrity status in the second half of the 20th century, chess has had a mixed reputation. In Europe it was the church that helped to popularize the game, even as it warned the public about its time-consuming and hence time-wasting nature. When Samuel Pepys, an ardent chess player, arrived at Cambridge University in the 1650s, it was regarded there as an "ingenious play" but "too tedious and time devouring".[8]

Transmitted to the new world by conquering and migrating Europeans, chess may even have contributed to the loss of the colonies in North America.[9] The story goes that the English General Rall was so absorbed in the game of chess that when a messenger brought him a note with the news that George Washington had determined to cross the Delaware and attack at Trenton, the General simply tucked the

note away in his vest pocket without reading it. The story is reminiscent of that by Premchand mentioned earlier. Interestingly, Washington too was a chess player and it is a pity that rather than fight a war the two generals did not play a game of chess with the colonies as their stake.

Many of the leaders of the newly formed republic were chess players, among whom Benjamin Franklin was perhaps the most obsessive. As Thomas Jefferson once remarked, "I played with Dr Franklin at chess and was equal to him at the game."[10] John Adams remarked on Franklin's intemperate indulgence in the game while in Paris, and Franklin himself admitted as much when he wrote in 1780 in his "Dialogue between Franklin and the Gout",

> [After dinner] Yours is to be fixed down to chess, where you are found engaged for two or three hours! This is your perpetual recreation... Wrapt in the speculations of this wretched game, you destroy your constitution...[11]

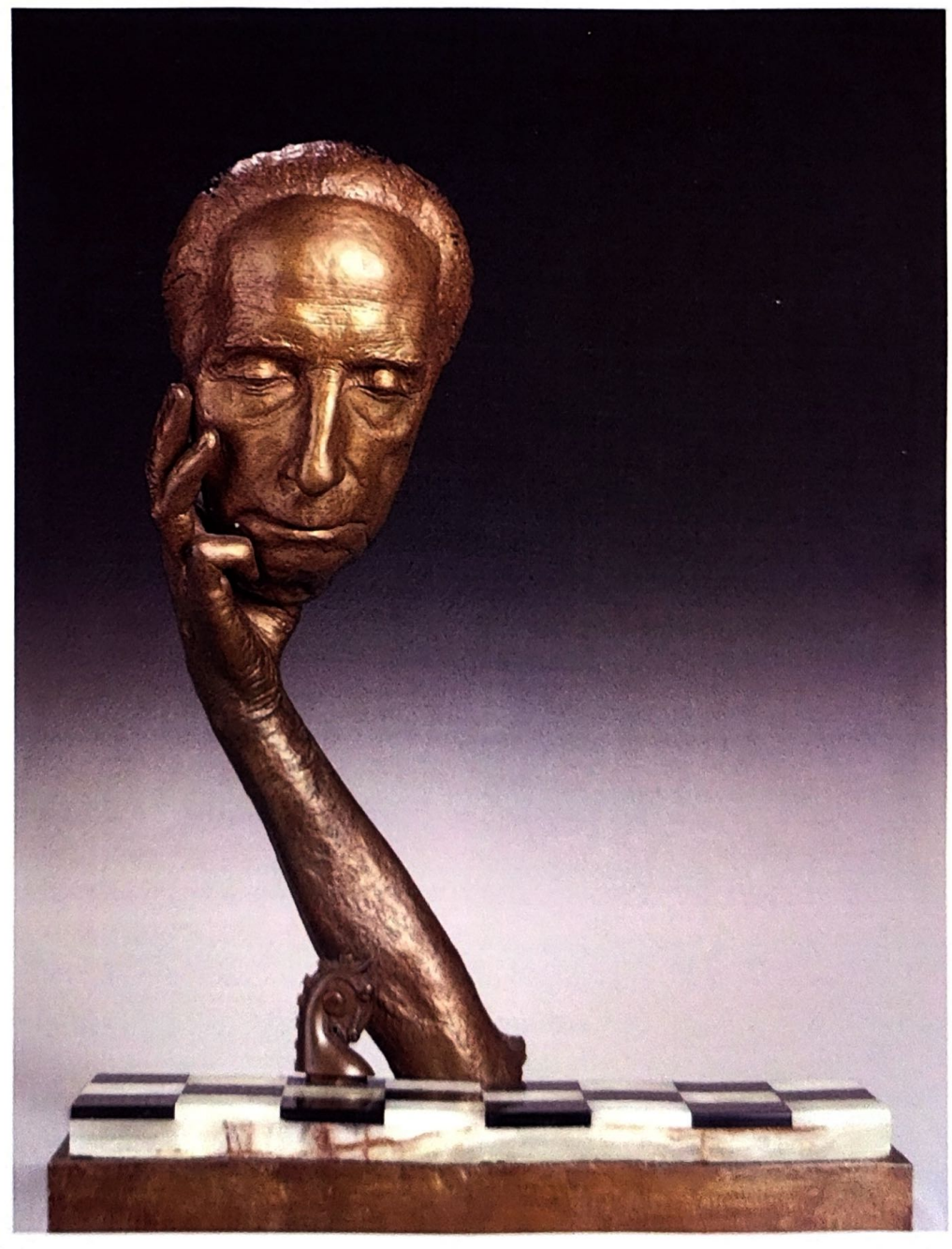
It is a wonder that between gout and chess Franklin found time enough to achieve as much as he did. He also wrote extensively about chess, his most well known work being "The Morals of Chess" published in 1779. Apart from being Franklin's equal in the game, Jefferson is regarded as the first American chess set collector.

The Francophile Franklin's obsession with the game was matched in the 20th century by the French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968).[12] Many other artists were fascinated by chess, but none was as passionate about the game as Duchamp. Nor has any other artist in history used chess as extensively in his art. So fascinated was he with chess that he is said to have given up making art in the early 1920s to devote all his time to playing chess. For Duchamp, art (like chess) was a game, and as Bradley Bailey has remarked:

> Three of Duchamp's major works during the years 1910–1911, *The Chess Game*, *The Chess Players*, and *Portrait of Chess Players*, not only indicate the pervasiveness of the game in his life and art, but also foreshadow the complex strategies he would use both in his art and in his often antagonistic relationship with art world officials.[13]

Many of his chess-related works were on view in the first major retrospective of his art in North America held in 1965 at the old Pasadena Art Museum, now subsumed into the Norton Simon Museum. A year before his death, Duchamp created what is probably one of the most striking self-portraits, in which he expressed his twin passions for art and chess with brilliant intensity and whimsy (figure 3).

Curiously, the first example of Indian art that the collector Norton Simon acquired in the early 1970s was a chess set (figure 4), even though he was not a player himself; it



3. *Marcel Duchamp moulé vif* ("Marcel Duchamp, moulded from life"), by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). Original wax assemblage executed 1966–67; this bronze version cast in 1967. Bronze with gold patina, onyx and black marble; 56.2 x 42.8 cm. Francey and Dr Martin L. Gecht Collection. Photograph courtesy of Christie's.

4. Chess set, John Company type. Probably Delhi-Punjab region, 19th century. Pieces: ivory; 7.6 to 15.2 cm. Board: wood inlaid with ivory; 75.6 x 75.6 cm. Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena F.1978.20.1–33.5. Photograph courtesy of the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena.

has remained a popular object among museum visitors. In a sense he had acquired a quintessentially Indian object that epitomizes the subcontinent's material, cultural, and intellectual prowess. As is now agreed by most scholars, the game was invented in the subcontinent, from where it was introduced to Western Asia and then to Europe, where the character of the game evolved over centuries to the present mode.

Three types of evidence can be brought to bear upon the Indian origin of the game: the structure of the game itself, literary allusions, and archaeological evidence. In the remaining portion of this article, I will offer some insights into the conceptual content of the game; present some hitherto unpublished allusions to chess in early Indian literature; and introduce new archaeological evidence from the subcontinent to push back its history.

III

The general consensus is that the game known as chaturanga, literally "four limbs", originated in India sometime in the early centuries CE.[14] The word chaturanga appears first in the two great epics – the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* – denoting the war machinery of a king, consisting of the chariot, cavalry, elephant brigade, and, of course, the infantry or foot-soldiers.

However, the game chaturanga finds sparse mention in any Indian literature, sacred or secular, of the 1st millennium CE.[15] This is surprising in several ways. Not only are many other games mentioned, but one of the greatest literary or religious texts that India has produced – the *Mahabharata* – revolves around a game of dice. However, it is curious that the highly cerebral game of chess found so little mention in literature, rhetorical or metaphorical, secular or religious, until the 11th century.[16]

It is to the ancient Persians that we owe our knowledge about the Indian origin of the game. Persian sources mention that the game was sent to the Sasanian monarch Khusrau Anushirvan (531–579) by an Indian ruler who has recently been identified in a monograph by the German scholar Renate Syed with the Maukhari king Sarvavarman (d. 585).[17] To bolster her argument she has also claimed that the game was familiar at the court of Harshavardhana (r. 603–648) of the Pushyabhuti dynasty who had conquered Kanauj. In the summary of her book on her website, she writes:

> From the work called Harshacarita (the Life of [king] Harsha), written by the poet Bana around 630/640 AD, we learn that at the court of King Harsha, who also ruled in Kanauj around 630/640, *caturanga* was played on a board of 64 squares, the *ashtapada*.[18]

First exclusive mention ? of chaturanga

Syed appears to have taken some poetic license of her own in interpreting the poet Banabhatta's brief allusion to the game.

In the second chapter of his *Harshacharita*, in a passage where he describes with cryptic similes the idyllic nature of his patron's reign, the poet says: *ashtapadana chaturangakalpana*.[19] Cowell and Thomas translate this as: "Only chessboards teach the position of the four 'members'."[20] Clearly the expression *ashtapadana* refers to the 64-square board and *chaturanga* to the game. In a footnote the two translators comment that, while denoting the game of chess, "the phrase may also mean the cutting off of the four

Possible connection between chaupar and chess

principal limbs [of the body]".[21] In fact, that is how two modern Sanskrit scholars translate Bana's statement when they write that only in chess are the four limbs cut off, not in real life in Harsha's kingdom.[22]

Apart from corroborating that severing limbs of criminals was a common practice in the subcontinent at the time, the passage proves beyond a doubt that the game of chess was familiar and it was played on a board of 64 squares.[23] Banabhatta certainly knew the game, but can one jump to the conclusion that it was played at the court of Harsha?

An earlier allusion to the game than the 7th century could perhaps occur in a verse by Bhartrihari, translated by Barbara Stoler Miller as follows:

> In a house where once there were many,
> Stands a solitary man.
> Where there were many descendants,
> No one remains.
> Tossing day and night
> As if they were two dice
> And moving men as if they were pawns,
> Time plays a frenzied game with Kali,
> His partner in destruction.[24]

The word *shara* is used by Bhartrihari to denote a board,[25] but it is not entirely clear what form of games board is implied (backgammon or some other race game has also been suggested as a possibility). If a form of chess played with dice were in fact intended, then this would be an earlier allusion to the game than Banabhatta's, since Bhartrihari is generally dated to the 4th or 5th century CE.

IV

While Banabhatta uses a secular game as a metaphor in a secular context, the first, and to my knowledge the only, metaphorical use of chess in Indian religious literature occurs in a Buddhist poem of the *charya* class. Among these folk songs composed and sung by the great *mahasiddhas* between the 10th and the 12th century, there is one by Kanhupada that beautifully exploits the game of chess as a spiritual metaphor. As translated by Atindra Mojumder, the verse is as follows:

> On the board of mercy I play chess.
> By the grace of my preceptor
> I have conquered the mundane world.
> Thakura being defeated, both are lost.
> The benefactor's advice brings "Jinapura"
> nearer to Kanhu.
> First I moved the pawns,
> then with the bishop I defeated the five.
> The king was stalled by the queen and
> the mundane world was overthrown.
> Kanhu says, I am doubtless a good player
> and I keep a vigilant eye
> on all the sixty-four squares of the
> board.[26]

The translation is adequate except for the unfortunate use of the names of the modern pieces.

Kanhupada employs the word Thakura to denote the king, which has interesting social and linguistic implications. Thakura is a common synonym of the Sanskrit *maharaja*, which is used with equal facility for the temporal and spiritual rulers in the Bengali language.[27] The word translated as pawn by Mojumder is *badia* from which comes the present day *bode*. The translator's "bishop" is really the bull elephant denoted by the word *gabara*, whereas the "queen" in the text is *matia* or *mati*, a colloquialism of the Sanskrit *mantri* meaning minister or counsellor. A more appropriate translation of the last two lines would be:

> Says Kanhu, I have made the right moves,
> On the board of sixty-four squares.

The word used for move is the Sanskrit word *dana* (also meaning gift), which may well be the source of the more commonly employed *daon*; hence the expression *daba* in Bengali to denote chess, rather than the Persian *dav*, as noted earlier.

In any event, what is clear is that when Kanhupada wrote his song, probably in the first half of the 11th century, chess must have been a popular game since these lyrics were composed for the common man rather than the bourgeoisie.[28] It may be noted that al-Biruni, who describes the four-handed

game of chess using dice in his magnum opus on India, was a visitor to the subcontinent in the first half of the 11th century. Noteworthy also is the characterization of the chessboard as the mundane world by a British scientist some eight centuries later, in the quotation used as an epigraph to this essay.

V

While the literary evidence for chess does not indicate a date earlier than the 5th or 6th century, archaeological evidence helps to push the history somewhat earlier. Almost a quarter of a century ago, J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw published a paper where she introduced two pieces that she dated, in my opinion correctly, to the 2nd or 3rd century.[29] One is an ivory chariot drawn by four horses found at Mantai in Sri Lanka and now in the Anuradhapura museum, and the other is a terracotta horse from Kondapur in Andhra Pradesh (figure 5).

It is interesting to introduce here a famous piece of Indian sculpture that may have some bearing on the antiquity of chess in the subcontinent (figure 6). This is the exquisitely carved relief from Jaggayyapeta that is dated to the 1st century BCE and represents the theme of the Chakravarti or Universal King. There is, of course, the king himself, accompanied by his queen and his minister. There are the elephant and the horse. The wheel symbolizing the Dharma may also represent the chariot. More significant for our discussion is that all the animated figures are represented as if they are chess pieces, each standing on a base. Moreover, a universal monarch by definition must have at his command the four limbs (*chaturanga*) of the state military machine. Would it be too far-fetched to interpret from the physical evidence that the artist who carved this extraordinary panel used chess pieces as his model? If so, he would not be the only one. Almost two millennia later, another artist in another continent displayed a far more passionate appetite for chess pieces as models. That artist was Marcel Duchamp.[30]

5. Horse. Kondapur, Andhra Pradesh. Terracotta; 6.7 cm. Government Museum, Hyderabad. After L. Ashton *The Art of India and Pakistan* (London, 1950).

Van Lohuizen also discussed three other ivory pieces – all representing elephants with riders – of which the largest (16 cm) is the well known and well published example in the Cabinet des Médailles in the Louvre Museum in Paris. The second largest one (10 cm) is now in the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (figure 7) and the third (only 5 cm) belonged to a dealer at the time. She argued that all three were examples of Shahi sculpture and could be dated broadly between the 7th and 9th century.[31]

The final unpublished early chess piece I would like to introduce here was purportedly found in Kashmir (figure 8). Although at first glance it relates to the so-called Shahi ivory pieces, the stone from which it is carved appears to be local and hence a Kashmiri provenance is not unlikely. It is of course a much simpler piece than the Shahi examples. Despite its tiny size (only 4.3 cm), its elegant simplicity and its stylistic features indicate an earlier date than the Shahi pieces. The treatment of the mahout's hair and the chequered cloth on the elephant's back are more characteristic of 5th–6th century Kashmiri sculpture than the 7th century.[32] Indeed, this piece may well represent the elephant (*gaja*), whereas the more impressive and elaborate ivory elephants in Paris and Berlin were likely used as the king (*raja*).

The importance of the elephant in the Indian game is evident not only from the Norton Simon chess set but from most Indian sets, certainly from recent centuries but also from the few early pieces found. Apart from the elephant forming one of the four limbs, the animal serves as the vehicle for both the king and the minister. Such preeminence of this most beloved of all animals on the subcontinent would argue against either a Persian or Chinese origin of the game. As far as I know, neither in the Persian nor in the Chinese army did the animal play so prominent a role as in India.

Almost certainly the rook in the Western game is the remnant of the howdah, or a small crenellated tower that was placed on

the elephant's back in ancient warfare so that archers could shoot arrows from within the safety of the structure's interior. Or, it could be an adaptation of the tower seen in royal chariots. In any event, the incongruity of the tower-like structure or castle to denote the rook is obvious: in a game involving movement one of the major pieces is represented now by a structure that cannot by definition move on its own.

That chess was an evolving, dynamic game is clear from other substitutes that are frequently encountered in sets. For instance, in the Norton Simon "John Company" set

First indirect but theological evidence of any kind of essence of Chess

6. Relief showing Chakravarti theme. Jaggayyapeta, Andhra Pradesh, 1st century BCE. Limestone.

Example of the opposite sides in Chaturanga

7. Fragment of a chessman, probably a king. Pakistan, Shahi period(?), 7th century. Ivory; height: 9.7 cm. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum für Indische Kunst.

from the Delhi area (figure 9) the camel has replaced the chariot.[33] The camel, along with the lion and buffalo, is also included in the lively ivory set from Behrampur/Murshidabad in West Bengal (figures 1 and 10).[34] It is generally thought that the camel is a late substitution as it occurs mostly in British Indian sets. Again, Banabhatta provides us with very early evidence of the use of the camel corps or brigade in King Harsha's army.[35] It thus seems that over the ages only the horse or cavalry (known as the knight today) has remained a steady feature.

While the Norton Simon set is said to depict the struggle between the Sikhs and the Afghans, in the Bengal set the antagonists are the British and the Indians. The animals represented on the British side are the horse with rider and the lion, whereas on the opposite side are the camel and the buffalo. Thus, the set, likely intended for a Hindu patron, uses the classical Indian literary device of double entendre in the selection of two of the animals: the lion and the buffalo are also antagonists in the popular tableau of the goddess Durga.

VI

While the literary evidence is scanty, the archaeological remains that can be considered to have an association with chess

8. Chessman, elephant rider. Kashmir, 5th–6th century. Stone; height: 4.3 cm. Private collection.

do seem to push the history of the game at least to the 1st century BCE. We are now on much more solid ground than Murray was in the early part of the last century to conclude that chess has had a history of at least two millennia on the subcontinent. Introduced thence to Persia in the 6th century, it found its way to Europe around the beginning of the 2nd millennium. Its conceptual evolution thereafter and its formal development have been phenomenal. The invention of the computer in the 20th century has introduced another and perhaps most radical dimension to the game. It is no longer a test of intelligence between two humans but, like solitaire, one can now play chess with a BlackBerry or similar device, to reduce the boredom of long journeys.[36]

What is no less fascinating is how chess players today have achieved celebrity status, notably since Bobby Fischer defeated Boris Spassky for the World Championship in 1972, followed soon after by his virtual retirement from the game. Even more interesting is the early retirement of the Russian Grand Master Gary Kasparov from competitive chess to enter the game of real life politics. As a recent headline in the *Los Angeles Times* announced, "Chess Champion Moves to Check Putin's Power".[37]

Chess is indeed an amazing game. Long before "globalization" became a buzzword, it was the first game to have crossed geopolitical boundaries to become a truly global game. How amazing that a sedentary game invented two thousand years ago as a contest of military strategy continues to "move" so dynamically at the beginning of the 3rd millennium of its existence.

NOTES

[1] As quoted in Munger 1998, vol. 2, p. 16. For chess scholars and enthusiasts, the four volumes of this book are extraordinary for their importance in the

9. (*above*) Detail of figure 4, showing camel rider. Photograph courtesy of the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena.

10. Detail of chess pieces from figure 1, showing buffalo and lion. Buffalo: height 5.8 cm, length 5.7 cm, width 2.6 cm. Lion: height 5.2 cm, length 6.3 cm, width 2.3 cm. Photograph: Shiharan Nandy.

visual diversity of chess pieces around the world and the global popularity of the game. However, his discussion about the history of chess contains outdated conclusions, such as chess being invented in Persia or Iran. I thank Christine Knoke of the Norton Simon Museum for bringing Munger's book to my attention.

[2] *na khelio daba re na khelio daba / thanar theke niye eshe bolechhilen baba*. The word *thana* means police station.

[3] We thank Anuradha Ghosh-Mazumdar of Sotheby's New York for the illustration.

[4] I am indebted to Dr Pratip Kumar Mitra of the West Bengal Archaeological Museum, Kolkata, for clarifying the issue and for bringing the Murshidabad chess set (figures 1 and 10) to my attention.

[5] This is not the only instance. Although sugar was invented on the subcontinent and the English word itself derives from the Sanskrit *sharkara*, the substance is known commonly as *chini* in Bengali, again a term borrowed from Persian.

[6] For the latest discussion, see Gunter 2004. Also interesting is Yalom 2004, where the author discusses the transformation of the minister into the queen in medieval Europe. Some writers such as Munger 1998 continue to believe in the Persian origin of chess, while others (such as John Saunders [2004], editor of *British Chess Magazine*) adhere to the outdated view of Joseph Needham that chess was invented by the Chinese.

[7] Sachau 1964, pp. 183–85. Al-Biruni makes clear that the four-handed game was unfamiliar to him and unknown in his homeland. This would imply that the form had been devised in India sometime before his arrival on the subcontinent but much later than the two-handed game's introduction into Persia in the 6th century.

[8] Saunders 2004.

[9] Munger 1998, pp. 21, 27.

[10] Ibid., p. 28.

[11] Ibid.

[12] The volume of literature on Duchamp is immense, both in print and online. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Michelle Deziel Hernandez of the Norton Simon Museum and Amy Pederson of UCLA for their help.

[13] Bailey 2000, p. 2.

[14] The assertion that the game originated in China or Persia should now be completely discarded. How could a game where the elephant plays so important a role be invented anywhere else but in India?

[15] See Bock-Raming 1995 and Bhatta 1995 for the latest discussion of literary sources.

[16] There are more instances of earlier mentions of chess, other than the 7th-century *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta, which appear to have escaped most scholars interested in the history of Indian chess. But a full discussion must be postponed for another occasion.

[17] Syed 2001.

[18] http://www.renate-syed.de (projects: chess).

[19] The passage is quoted from Banabhatta 1987, p. 246.

[20] Cowell and Thomas, n.d., p. 65.

[21] Ibid., p. 65, fn. 4.

[22] Banabhatta 1987, p. 60.

[23] The number 64 is of course very important in Indian numerology and particularly in gambling. See Schimmel 1993, pp. 258–60. In the earliest sacred text, the *Rigveda*, the chapters are arranged in 64 sections.

[24] Miller 1967, pp. 124–25; see also the articles by M. Soar ("Shiva and Parvati at Play") and by A. Topsfield ("Dice, Chaupar, Chess") in this volume, for other translations of this poem.

[25] M. Monier-Williams (*A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* [Oxford, OUP, 1979], p. 1066) translates the word as both chess and draughts. In *Amarakosha*, considered by some to have been composed during the Gupta period, *ashtapada* and *shariphala* are used as synonyms for boards and are listed in the passage on gambling in *Odravarga* (10, 44–47) immediately following liquor or drinking. Curiously, chaturanga is not mentioned.

[26] Mojumder 1967, pp. 7–8 for the original text and p. 47 for the translation.

[27] As, for instance, most Bengalis refer to the 19th-century mystic Ramakrishna Paramahamsa simply as *thakur*.

[28] See Templeman 1989 for a discussion of the life and works of this *mahasiddha*, who was also known as Kanha, Krishnapada, and Krishnacharya.

[29] van Lohuizen 1985. Noteworthy is the mention of ivory chess pieces of the Kushana period (1st–3rd century CE) found in Dalverzin-tepe in Uzbekistan (Dwivedi 1976, p. 9), which I have not been able to

see. The Bharhut evidence mentioned by van Lohuizen has nothing to do with chess.

[30] Bailey 2000.

[31] There is little evidence other than these three pieces of a tradition of ivory carving in the Shahi kingdom in Afghanistan, but 8th-century Kashmir had a flourishing centre for ivory carving: see Dwivedi 1976, pp. 101–05. The early ivories found at Begram in Afghanistan were certainly imported from the subcontinent.

[32] See Paul 1986, figs. 9 (Harwan tile), 47–48, 56.

[33] There seems to be some uncertainty regarding the position of the camel, which can substitute for either the rook or the bishop. Thanks to Christine Knoke for arranging new photography for this article.

[34] The existence of this set was brought to my attention by Dr Pratip Kumar Mitra. This kind of chess set including lion and buffalo seems to have been particularly popular with Murshidabad patrons as several sets exist. See also figure 10 in Amin Jaffer's article in the present volume.

[35] Upon approaching the royal camp, Banabhatta first describes the hordes of elephants, which he says had made the gate appear black as there were so many. He then devotes a passage to describing the horses and finally the camels (chapter 2): Cowell and Thomas, n.d. pp. 46–47.

[36] See de Voogt 1995, part V, pp. 134–75, for several interesting articles about chess and artificial intelligence.

[37] Since this text was written, almost two years ago, Kasparov has not grabbed any headlines as a budding politician.

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SHIVA AND PARVATI AT PLAY
BACKGAMMON IN ANCIENT INDIA

MICAELA SOAR

The game of backgammon is not normally associated with India, though it was commonly played there during the Mughal and British periods, as a result of Persian and later European cultural influence. In India today it is hardly played except among Muslims in the Deccan, and is there usually considered to be a game of West Asian origin. Early Persian historical and literary traditions dating from the 6th century CE indeed claim backgammon as a local invention, but its precise antecedents are now long forgotten and probably over four millennia old.[1]

Two later evolutionary strands have been identified. One, originally known as the Roman game *duodecim scripta*, was played with 30 pieces on the 3 x 12-row boards of the 1st to 4th centuries CE, discovered in former Roman territories; it later developed into the 2 x 12-row alea or tabli played by the Byzantines. The other is the game of nard from Persia, which spread into Europe through contact with the Arabs at the time of the Crusades. The Roman boards had "points" made of rosettes, patterns, or letters of the alphabet to indicate the houses, rather than the rectangular, triangular, or square shape of the houses in nard. Backgammon died out in Europe between the 6th and 12th centuries, after the Roman game disappeared and before the Arab game arrived.

At the same period as this hiatus in Europe, hitherto unnoticed forms of backgammon boards were already in use in India, as is shown by their representations in a number of temple sculptures, especially those relating to the myth of the dice game of Shiva and his consort Parvati. This evidence strongly suggests that backgammon enjoyed a lasting popularity in India during much of the 1st millennium CE, if not earlier.

The Indian tradition

The theme of Shiva and Parvati playing dice is an important one in western Indian sculpture, particularly at the cave temples of western Maharashtra, where such scenes appear in prominent positions in relation to the shrine. The Hindu caves at Ellora contain seven monumental representations of this subject. It also appears at the Elephanta and Jogeshwari caves, which have related iconographic programmes.[2] In eastern India, another group of examples is found in Orissan temples, but these scenes are far less prominent, usually appearing on doorjambs or lintels over doorways.[3]

1. Relief of Shiva and Parvati playing dice. Madhya Pradesh, 10th century. Rani Durgavati Museum, Jabalpur. Photograph courtesy American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon.

in illustrations to poetical texts and in scenes of life at court or in the zenana.

The game is also sometimes referred to in the literature of the 15th–16th-century *bhakti* (devotional) movement, though the dating of individual verses attributed to the prolific canons of the *bhakti* poets is often far from certain. The mystical poems of Kabir, a weaver of Banaras in the 15th century, often draw their imagery from daily life in the city:

9. Laur loses to King Mahipat at chaupar. Illustration to the *Chandayana*. Early Rajput style, Agra region or Rajasthan, c. 1550. Gouache on paper. Lahore Museum.

> The chaupar is spread out at the cross-roads
> in the midst of the up-and-down bazaar:
> With the Satguru [Perfect Teacher] as your partner,
> you will never lose the game![32]

In esoteric Tantric terms, the chaupar board here stands for the human body; the "bazaar" is *samsara* (the world of death and rebirth) with its "ups and downs"; and the "crossroads" is the *trikuti* (point between the eyebrows) where the three main *nadis* or currents of psychic energy meet. Through *bhakti* and the True Guru's guidance, the devotee may strive to win through in the game of life:

> Taking the dice of Love,
> making his body the board,
> Learning the throw from the Satguru,
> the servant Kabir has played.

References to chaupar are similarly ascribed to Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the revered first Guru of the Sikhs:

> He started playing, making the four ages the chaupar board,
> all creatures the pieces, while He casts the dice.

And again:

> You fashioned creation and infused it with energy:
> You behold what You have created, placing the pieces –
> some "home", others still going round.
> Whatever has entered will depart, each in its turn.[33]

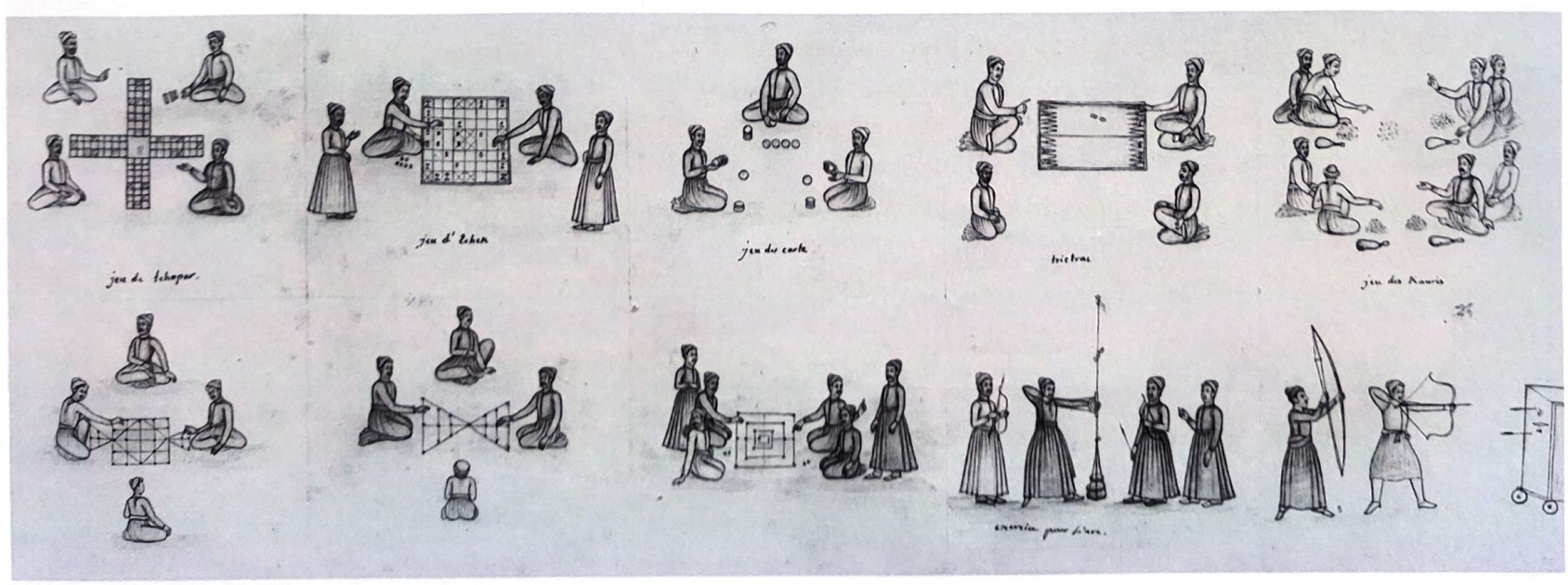
Other Hindu devotional poets such as Sur Das (c. 1480–1560?), a follower of Vallabhacharya (1479–1531), also make reference to chaupar, again either as a spiritual metaphor or in the context of Krishna and Radha playing the game on Diwali night, as part of their divine *lila* or play (see figure 6).[34] References to the game occur also in two early 16th-century Sufi romances. In the *Mrigavati* of Qutban (1503/4), chaupar is played during a hunting party, while in the *Padmavat* of Jayasi (c. 1540) it is stated at one point that "In every palace there is the game of chaupar".[35] The

illustrated *Mrigavati* series in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras, also probably pre-dating 1550, shows another early depiction of a chaupar game.[36]

During the Mughal period, chaupar was more popular than ever in court society. Akbar's enthusiasm for the game in the early part of his reign is well known. Tournaments were held lasting as long as three months, and if any courtier "lost his patience and got restless, he had to drink a cup of wine".[37] One nobleman annoyed the Emperor so much by "losing not only his gold mohurs, but his temper" when playing the game, that he was sent off to Mecca on pilgrimage.[38] However, the tale of Akbar and his courtiers playing chaupar on the giant courtyard board at Fatehpur Sikri, with 16 slave girls dressed in four different colours as the pieces, is probably a later invention.[39] Such revels might perhaps have taken place in the 18th century, under the pleasure-loving Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–48).[40]

Chaupar certainly remained a favourite board game in 18th-century Oudh (Awadh). In 1774 Col. Jean-Baptiste Gentil, the French military adviser to Nawab Shuja ud-Daula at Faizabad, commissioned an album of illustrations of Indian life by local artists and devoted one of its pages to sedentary games and other sports (figure 10).[41] He evidently grouped these little vignettes of games in a rough order of popularity, putting chaupar (or pachisi) first of all, followed by scenes of men playing chess, cards, backgammon (tric-trac), dice with 16 cowries, and three games of the Tiger and Sheep or Nine Men's Morris types.[42]

By the mid-19th century chaupar remained generally popular at all levels of society, and the royal passion for the game of the eccentric Krishnaraja Wodeyar of Mysore exceeded even that of Akbar. Although the chaupar theme had ceased to inspire Indian poets and artists, the game began to attract the attention of British observers more than before. A study of Rajputs playing a game of "Pucheesee" taken by Captain Eugene Impey (figure 11), possibly when serving at Alwar in Rajasthan in the early 1860s, must be one of the earliest photographs of the game.[43] The grouping of figures is of course artfully staged, as their postures had to be held for the long exposure time required. The two nearer figures sit as if engaged in play, rolling the dice and moving a piece, while their companions look on or away. William Carpenter's watercolour of a decade earlier (figure 12) shows three townsmen and a holy man playing the game at Omkara Mandhata in central India. The participants in both these scenes have a calm air of studious attention to their game. They thus exhibit a happy medium between the gross torpor reported of Bengali chaupar players by the less than charitable Rev. Tennant in



10. Some games of Hindustan. The Gentil Album (of drawings of Indian life and customs), fol. 22a (detail). Faizabad, Oudh, 1774. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

11. (*facing page*) "Rajpoots playing the Game of Pucheesee". By Eugene Impey in Rajasthan, early 1860s. Albumen print from a wet collodion negative: illustration to E.C. Impey, *Delhi, Agra and Rajpootana*, 1865.

12. "The game of pachisi, Ooncar Mandatta". Watercolour by William Carpenter, at Omkara Mandhata, central India, early 1850s. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

1798,[44] or (in contrast) the excitable brouhaha described by the Rev. Lal Behari Dey in 1851.[45]

Indian chess in life and art

Chess, which appears second in Gentil's pictorial tableau of the games of Oudh (see figure 10), is the only ancient board game to have enjoyed a continuous popularity in India since its likely invention there nearly 2,000 years ago.[46] Thus the two noblewomen of Oudh who are concentrating on their opening move (White has played P-Q3), oblivious to a throng of attendants, women, and children (figure 13),[47] are participants in an ancient indigenous tradition, stretching from the unknown early masters of the Punjab or Gangetic Plain to countless later chess-playing kings and their subjects, like the Guler nobleman and priest in their splendid flowered *jamas*, so solemnly intent on their play on a terrace (figure 14).[48]

Following the gradual introduction of European rules in the 19th century, Indian players also began to make their mark on modern international chess. The subtly oblique "Indian" openings championed by the Hypermodern School in Europe in the 1920s originated partly in a game played in India by the Scottish barrister John Cochrane (1798–1878) against Moheshunder, "the Brahmin", who unexpectedly responded to the opening move P-Q4, which lays claim to the centre, by moving a knight to KB6, followed by a fianchetto development in one corner. The Madras player Ghulam Kassim (d. 1844) also gave his name to a variation of the more dashing King's Gambit, and collaborated with James Cochrane of the Indian Civil Service on the first openings monograph, an analysis of the Muzio Gambit published in 1829.[49] India's greatest player of the early 20th century, Sultan Khan (1905–66), was a humble retainer of Sir Umar Hayat Khan, who brought him to play in London in 1929. In a few short years, he repeatedly won the British Championship, achieved spectacular results in international tournaments, and was deemed a genius by the incomparable Capablanca himself (World

Champion, 1921–27). In 1933 Sultan Khan returned with his master to the ancestral domains (in modern Pakistan), and lived on there in contented obscurity.[50] At the time of writing, another exceptionally gifted Indian player, Vishwanathan Anand (b. 1969), is among the two or three strongest grandmasters at world level.

The Lucknow ladies' absorption in their game is famously characteristic of chess players everywhere. It reappears, in a modern context, in Raghubir Singh's eloquent photograph of insouciant chess-players in a Ganga-flooded street of Banaras (figure 15).[51] Such concentration could of course be carried to excess. A dramatic tale is told by Tod of two chess-playing Mughal nobles, part of a force occupying a fortress in Rajasthan, who became so immersed in their game that they ignored the Rajputs' victorious attack on the fort and went on playing. Captured at last in the inmost keep, "they coolly begged that they might be allowed to terminate their game".[52] This was allowed, but they were still put to death. Their endgame must have had a strongly existential quality, rather like the fateful chess play between Death and the Knight in Bergman's classic film *The Seventh Seal*.[53]

In his tragic story of two similarly chess-obsessed nobles, *The Chess Players* (*Shatranj ke khilari*, 1924), the Hindi writer Premchand satirized the escapist ethos of 19th-century Lucknow society, and its obliviousness to the greater political game that was being played out by the British in their moves to annex the kingdom:

> It was the time of Wajid Ali Shah. Lucknow was plunged in pleasures. The young and the old, the poor and the rich – all were pleasure-bent... There was among the people a passion for the chess-board and the playing-card...[54]

Premchand's story was later reinterpreted by the director Satyajit Ray in his film of the same name (1975).[55]

Neither chess nor its 8 x 8 playing board (used also for the early *ashtapada* race game) seems to have appeared in early

13. Noblewomen playing chess in a palace. Lucknow, c. 1780–90, possibly by Niwasi Lal after Tilly Kettle. Gouache on paper; 47 x 62 cm. Present location unknown.

14. Mian Gopal Singh of Guler playing chess with the family priest Pandit Dinamani Raina. Guler, Punjab Hills, c. 1720. 18 x 25.8 cm. Gouache on paper. Government Museum, Chandigarh. Photograph: B. Kammerer, Museum Rietberg, Zurich.

Indian sculpture. Early literary references are also few and vague, and have been endlessly debated by scholars. However, with the *Manasollasa* of King Someshvara (c. 1100) and later descriptive treatises, firmer ground is reached in our knowledge of the Indian game. Among the later Hindi poetic references to chess, the *Padmavat* romance again includes an interesting instance. When Shah Alauddin contrives to glimpse the beauteous Padmavati by means of a mirror, while playing chess with King Ratansen of Chitor, the text contains a series of double meanings alluding to the chess pieces and their moves:

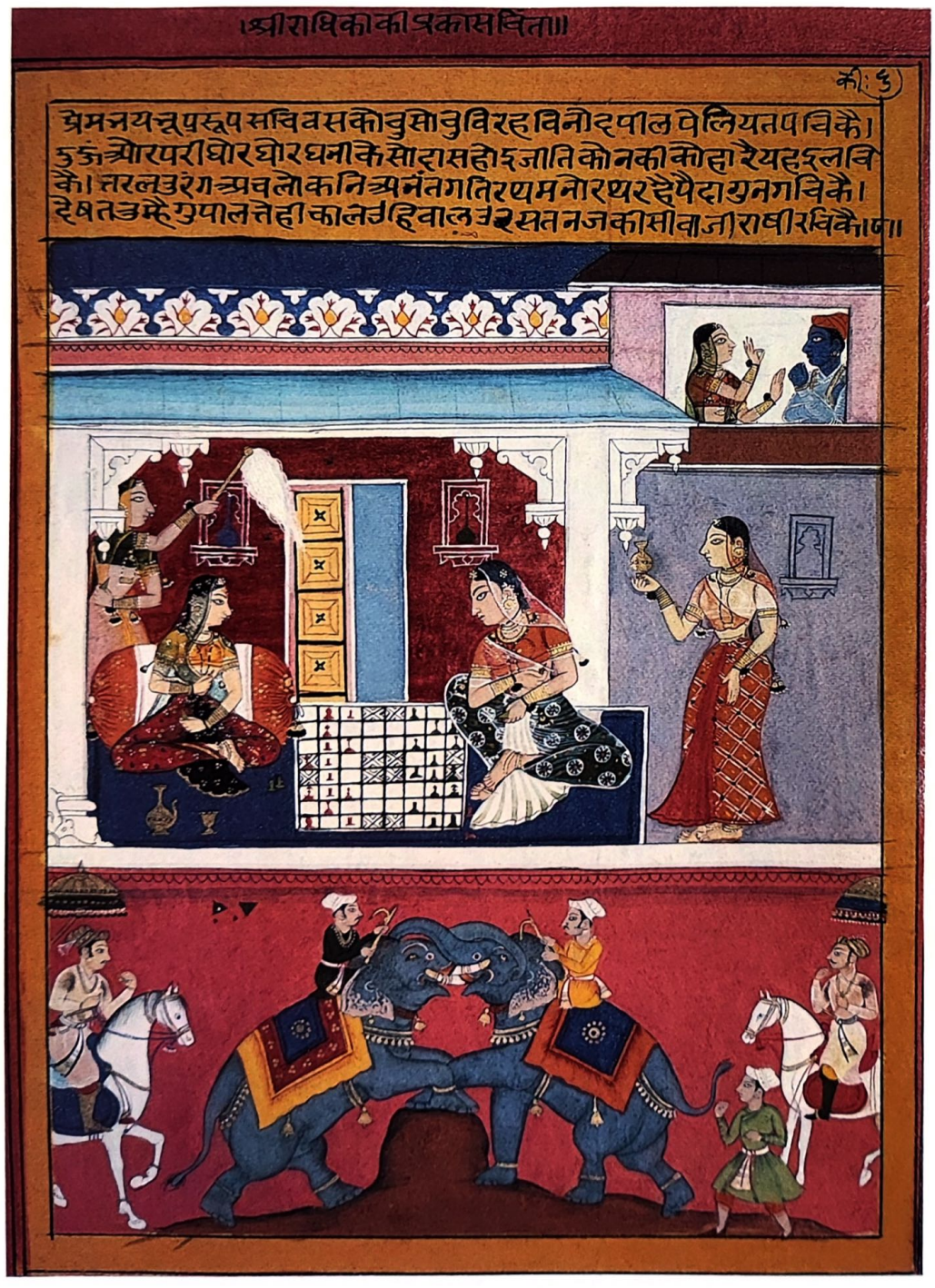
> ...The Shah made ready a game of chess. "O King, so long as it is hot overhead, let us twain for a space take our ease." The Shah fixed a mirror there upon the wall: "I will see her [he thought] whenever she comes to the lattice." The twain play, the Shah and the King: the Shah's gaze [or Castle] remains fixed upon the mirror. The passionate lover walks on foot [pun on Pawn]; he looks straight ahead and advances after establishing his position. [The Shah] moved his Knight and threatened the Queen: he got the piece which he wanted in front of his vision [or Castle; or: he saw Padmavati in the mirror]. The king moved his Bishop and called check: after giving check he is nearly defeated by losing his Castle. He threatened Bishop with Bishop: both became interlocked. The king wished to make it stalemate: the Shah wished for checkmate...[56]

A reconstruction of their play has even been attempted by V.S. Agravala in his edition. According to his diagram,[57] Alauddin (playing Black) is down by three pieces and some pawns, which would seem to imply some clever previous sacrifices since he now threatens Ratansen's cornered king with imminent mate.

Another subtle play on chess imagery occurs in the *Rasikapriya* of Keshav Das (1591),[58] a poetical treatise on ideal lovers (*nayaka*s and *nayika*s), which was interpreted, in an often masterly fashion, by the Udaipur court painter Sahibdin in the 1630s (figure 16).[59] Here a confidante is telling the *nayaka* (at upper right): "When that young girl [the *nayika*] saw you, she

15. Chess Players, monsoon floods, Banaras, 1967. Photograph by Raghubir Singh. © Succession Raghubir Singh.

planned a wager of chess in her mind." In this metaphorical chess game, "love" is the king, "shyness" and "concern" are the ministers, "pleasures of separation" are the elephants, "glances of compassion" are the horses, and "desires" are the pawns. While the *nayika* and her companion sit intent on their game (still apparently in its early stages),[60] Sahibdin has introduced in the foreground an artful grouping based on these chess pieces. A pair of "elephants" tussle in formal combat over a wall (a regular form of entertainment at the palace), while "ministers" on horseback and a "pawn" on foot look on. Thus a common tamasha or spectacle of court life mirrors the play of a chess game, which itself mirrors the hidden emotions of the human heart.



16. The *nayika* plays a game of chess. Illustration to the *Rasikapriya* of Keshav Das. Attributed to Sahibdin. Udaipur, Rajasthan, c. 1635. Gouache on paper. Government Museum, Udaipur.

NOTES

[1] L. Renou, *La civilisation de l'Inde ancienne d'après les textes sanskrits*, Paris, 1950, p. 233 ("Sur le jeu dans l'Inde ancienne il serait possible d'écrire un livre massif.").

[2] T. Hyde, *De ludis orientalibus libri duo*, Oxford, 1694. On the polymathic Thomas Hyde (1636–1702), see R.C. Bell, *Board and table games of many civilizations*, repr. New York, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 184–87; R. Irwin, *For lust of knowing: The Orientalists and their enemies*, London, 2006, pp. 99–100.

[3] *Asiatick Researches*, II, Calcutta, 1790, pp. 159–65.

[4] R. von Leyden et al., *Spielkarten-Bilder in persischen Lackmalereien der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, Vienna, 1981; L. Diba, "Persian playing cards: A courtly art", in C. Mackenzie and I.L. Finkel, eds., *Asian games: The art of contest*, New York, 2004, pl. 18: 2, pp. 234–37.

[5] E.g. D. Ali, *Courtly culture and political life in early medieval India*, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 254–55.

[6] H.J.R. Murray, *A history of chess*, Oxford, 1913, remains the fundamental work; a more recent and incisive survey is R. Eales, *Chess: The history of a game*, London, 1985.

[7] E.g. Eales, *Chess: The history of a game*, Ch. 2: "The symbolic game of the Middle Ages".

[8] M. Soar, "Shiva and Parvati at play: Backgammon in ancient India", in the present volume.

[9] P.J. Claus, "Playing *cenne*: The meaning of a folk game", in S. Blackburn, ed., *Another harmony: New essays on the folklore of India*, Berkeley, 1986, pp. 278–79.

[10] For mancala in south India and Ceylon, see H.J.R. Murray, *A history of board games other than chess*, Oxford, 1952, pp. 168–73; H. Parker, *Ancient Ceylon*, London, 1909, pp. 587ff.; A. de Voogt, *Mancala board games*, London, 1997, pp. 71–76; A. de Voogt, "Mancala boards (Olinda Keliya) in the National Museums of Colombo", *Board Game Studies*, 3, 2000.

[11] Victoria and Albert Museum I.M. 18-1938; P. Jayakar and J. Irwin, *Textiles and ornaments of India*, New York, 1956, illus. p. 81 (there incorrectly described as a spice box).

[12] For this and other games mentioned here, see relevant articles by Topsfield, Finkel, Rangachar,

recorded; see J.M. Fritz and D. Gibson, "Game boards at Vijayanagara", forthcoming; also Vasantha Rangachar, "Board games from the city of Vijayanagara (Hampi) 1336–1565", *Board Game Studies*, 6, 2003, pp. 25–36.

[31] A. Topsfield, *Court painting at Udaipur*, Zurich, 2002, p. 31, fig. 12, with refs.

[32] C. Vaudeville, tr., *Kabir*, vol. 1, Oxford, 1974, p. 159 (here slightly adapted) and fns. 57–59, for commentary on the symbolism. As remarked above, these verses are not necessarily of Kabir's time however.

[33] *Asu mi Patti*, 26, and *Asu ki var*, 20: *Adi Granth*, pp. 433–34, 473: I am grateful to Christopher Shackle for providing these references and translations from the Punjabi. Such use of chaupar imagery still continues in the Sikh tradition, e.g. in a discourse by Sant Kirpal Singh (1894–1974) on the theme "Life is a game of chaupar" (see: www.ruhanisatsangusa.org/).

[34] *Sur Sagar*, 4th ed., Kashi, VS 2029, p. 20. A spiritual discourse attributed to Sur Das on the theme of chaupar appears in the hagiographical *Chaurasi vaishnavan ki varta*, reputedly edited by Hariray (16th century) from accounts inherited from Gokulnath (1552–1641): translated in R. Barz, *The Bhakti sect of Vallabhacharya*, Faridabad, 1976, pp. 118–20. I am grateful to Rupert Snell for these references.

[35] Qutban, *Mrigavati*, ed. S.G. Mishra, Prayag, Saka 1886, p. 101; Jayasi, *Padmavati*, ed. V.S. Agravala, Jhansi, VS 2012, 44:6; and A.G. Shirreff, tr., *Padmavati*, Calcutta, 1944, p. 34. I am grateful to Simon Digby for these references.

[36] The *Mrigavati* illustration (fol. 198) is published by K. Khandalavala in A. Krishna, ed., *Chhavi: Golden Jubilee Volume*, Varanasi, 1971, fig. 92.

[37] *'Ain-i Akbari*, pp. 315–16.

[38] But he was recalled before his departure from India: *'Ain-i Akbari*, p. 374.

[39] This story is unsupported by contemporary Mughal sources. It may perhaps have been told in this form by local site guides around 1800 or soon after, then retold by Ja'far Sharif in his *Qanun-i Islam* (G.A. Herklots, tr., *Islam in India*, ed. W. Crooke, repr. London, 1975, p. 334) and by later 19th-century writers. From the French traveller Louis Rousselet's account (*India and its native princes*, London, 1876), it was adopted into the games literature by E. Falkener in his *Games ancient and oriental*, London, 1892, pp. 257–58.

[40] Following M.A. Husain, *A guide to Fatehpur Sikri*, Delhi, 1937, p. 18, who remarks that the central sandstone seat of the courtyard board is "evidently too crude to be assigned to a builder of Akbar's taste", and suggesting that a later ruler like Muhammad Shah (crowned at Fatehpur in 1720) could have been responsible. I am grateful to Ebba Koch for the observation that the so-called pachisi courtyard board in the Agra Fort, in the small, Shah Jahan period courtyard between the Shah (or Muthamman) Burj and the stairway up to the Diwan-i Khas, is in fact a (deceptive) cruciform covering for a drainage system, as first suggested by M.A. Husain.

[41] Victoria and Albert Museum, I.S. 25-1980, f. 22a; see M. Archer, *Company paintings: Indian paintings of the British period*, London, 1992, pp. 117–23.

[42] Gentil's selection was of course not exhaustive: we know, for example, from the games drawings commissioned by Richard Johnson at Lucknow in the early 1780s that gyan chaupar (Snakes and Ladders) and ganj (Treasure) were also current: see Topsfield, "Instant Karma", fig. 5, and Digby, "Treasure", fig. 2, in the present volume; also T. Falk and M. Archer, *Indian miniatures in the India Office Library*, London, 1981, cat. no. 361.

[43] This photograph appeared in Capt. E.C. Impey, *Delhi, Agra and Rajpootana, illustrated by eighty photographs*, London, 1865, pl. 67a. On Eugene Impey, see articles by A. Topsfield in *History of Photography*, XIV, 3, 1990; XX, 1, 1996.

[44] Rev. W. Tennant, *Indian recreations: Consisting chiefly of strictures on the domestic and rural economy of the Mahomedans & Hindoos*, London, 1804, vol. 1, p. 366: "The game of paucheess (twenty-five), which ... is played by two natives lying on their sides, with a small chequered carpet placed between them, is the general entertainment of the idle, when not overpowered with sleep or intoxication. Whole days are spent in watching the adversary's tesserae, or in planning evolutions of their own; and their habits are completely gratified, if by slightly agitating the mind, and awakening their attention, a consciousness of existence is preserved, and made compatible with corporeal inaction." I am indebted to the late Nirad Chaudhuri for this reference.

[45] Rev. Lal Behari Dey, "Bengali games and amusements", *Calcutta Review*, XV, 1851, repr. in *Selections from the Calcutta Review*, Calcutta, 1882, pp. 413–29. His passage on the playing of chaupar was later quoted by Falkener, *Games ancient and oriental*, pp. 258–59; see also Finkel, "The Four-Arm Race", in the present volume. As well as being a Christian priest and missionary, Dey became well-known as the author of *Bengal peasant life*, *Folk tales of Bengal*, and other works.

[46] Eales, *Chess: The history of a game*, Ch. 1, for a balanced account of the disputed origins of chess.

[47] Formerly Sadruddin Aga Khan collection: B.N. Goswamy and E. Fischer, *Wonders of a Golden Age*, Zurich, 1987, no. 107; Sotheby's sale cat., October 12, 2004, lot 6, there dated c. 1780–1800 and attributed to Niwasi Lal, perhaps after a composition of the British artist Tilly Kettle, who had worked at Faizabad in 1772.

[48] B.N. Goswamy and E. Fischer, *Pahari masters*, Zurich, 1992, no. 92.

[49] D. Hooper and K. Whyld, *The Oxford Companion to Chess*, Oxford, 1984, s.v. "Ghulam Kassim Gambit", "Indian Defence".

[50] Hooper and Whyld, *Oxford Companion*, s.v. "Sultan Khan".

[51] Raghubir Singh, *The Ganges*, London, 1992, pl. 81.

[52] Tod, *Annals and antiquities of Rajasthan*, vol. 1, p. 176n. Similar stories appear in other historical contexts, e.g. H. Smith, *Festivals, games, and amusements, ancient and modern*, London, 1831, pp. 331–32: "Dr Hyde, quoting from an Arabic history of the Saracens, tells us, that the Calif of Baghdad was engaged at chess with his freedman Kuthar, when a soldier rushed in to inform him that the city, which was then vigorously besieged, was on the point of being carried by assault. 'Let me alone,' said the Calif, 'for I see check-mate against Kuthar!'"

[53] Ingmar Bergman, *The Seventh Seal* (Sweden, 1957).

[54] Prem Chand, *The Chess Players and other stories*, tr. G. Mallik, New Delhi, 1967, p. 133.

[55] For a comparative study, see F.W. Pritchett, "'The Chess Players': From Premchand to Satyajit Ray", *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 21, 2, 1986, pp. 65–78 [and online version].

[56] *Padmavat*, Canto 46: 16, Shirreff, tr., *Padmavati*, pp. 324–25; I am grateful to Robert Skelton for a scanned transcript.

[57] V.S. Agravala, *Padmavat*, rev. ed., Jhansi, 2000, pp. 612–16 and end diagram, showing Black (Alauddin) with knight at e5, rook e7, bishop f7, queen h5, and king h6; and white (Ratansen) with pawns at b5, d2, g3, and g5, bishops f6 and g7, knights e3 and f8, and king h8. I am grateful to Simon Digby for bringing this reconstruction to my notice.

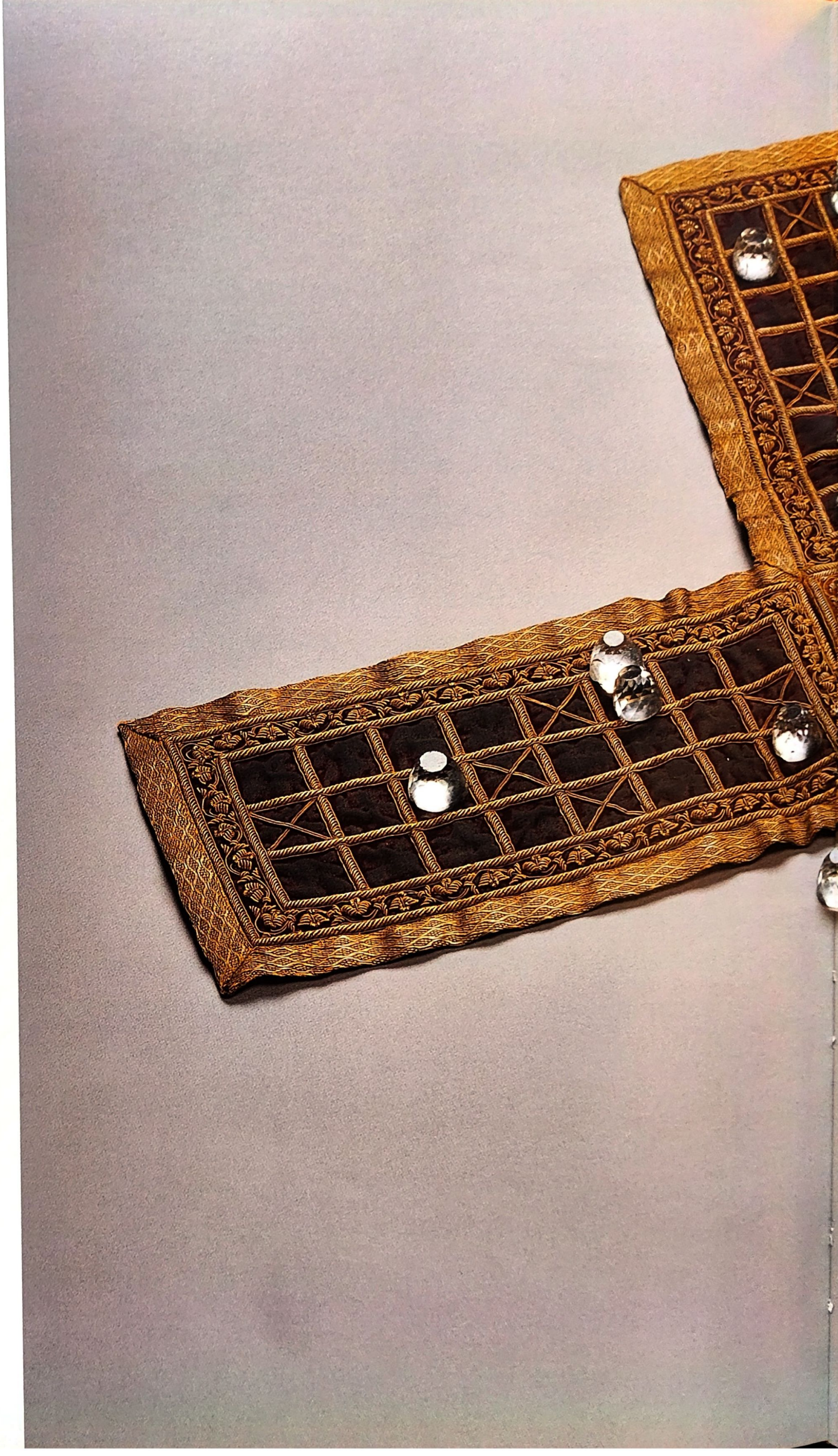
[58] *Rasikapriya*, VIII: 17; K.P. Bahadur, tr., *The Rasikapriya of Keshavadasa*, Delhi, 1972, p. 137.

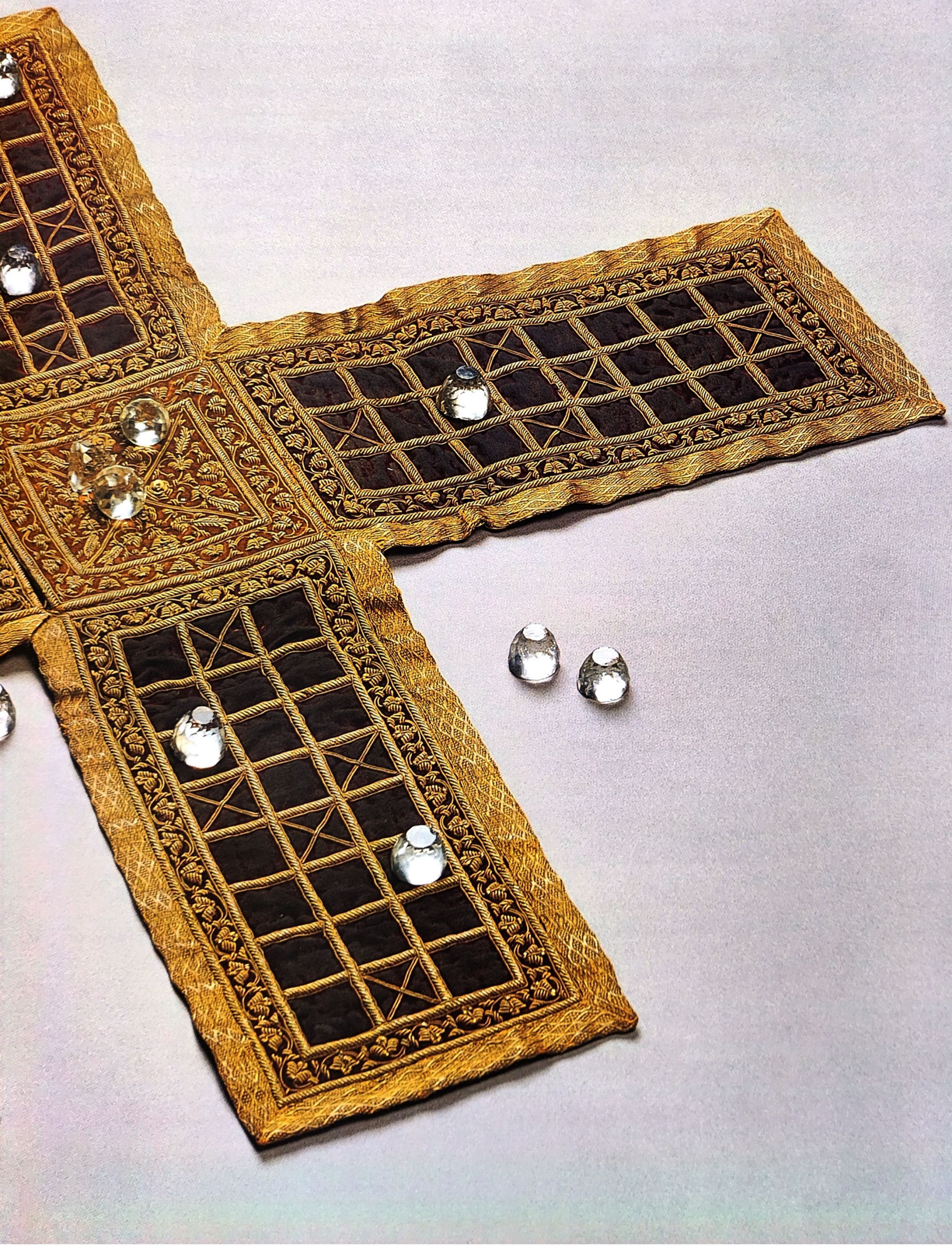
[59] A. Topsfield, "Sahibdin's illustrations to the *Rasikapriya*", *Orientations*, 17, 3, March 1986, p. 27, fig. 11.

[60] The position is hard to read: neither side has pieces beyond the third rank, yet one or two pieces seem to have been taken off the board already. For other representations of games in Sahibdin's oeuvre, see a chaupar scene in another *Rasikapriya* page (B.N. Goswamy, *Painted visions: The Goenka collection of Indian paintings*, New Delhi, 1999, pl. 99), and both chess and chaupar in a page from the *Sukrakshetramahatmya* of 1655 (A. Topsfield, "The saving power of Soron", in Topsfield, ed., *Court painting in Rajasthan*, Mumbai: Marg, 2000, fig. 6).

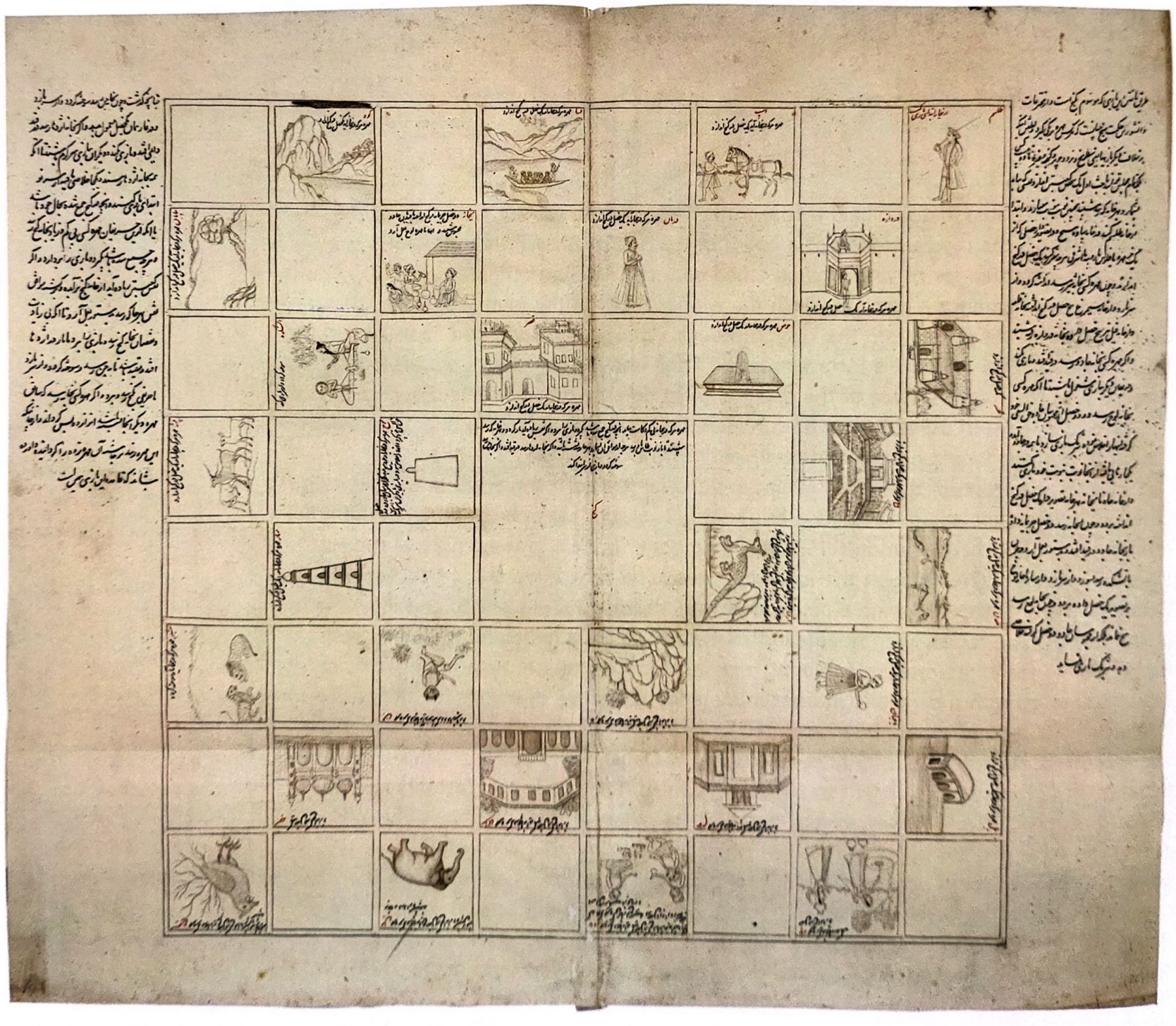
2. Maharana Jagat Singh II plays pachisi (or chaupar) in his palace. Udaipur, Rajasthan, c. 1740. Gouache on paper. Present location unknown. Photograph: Simon Ray Ltd, London.

5. Pachisi or chaupar board. India, 18th century. Velvet and gold wire; 30.5 x 30.5 cm. Private collection.

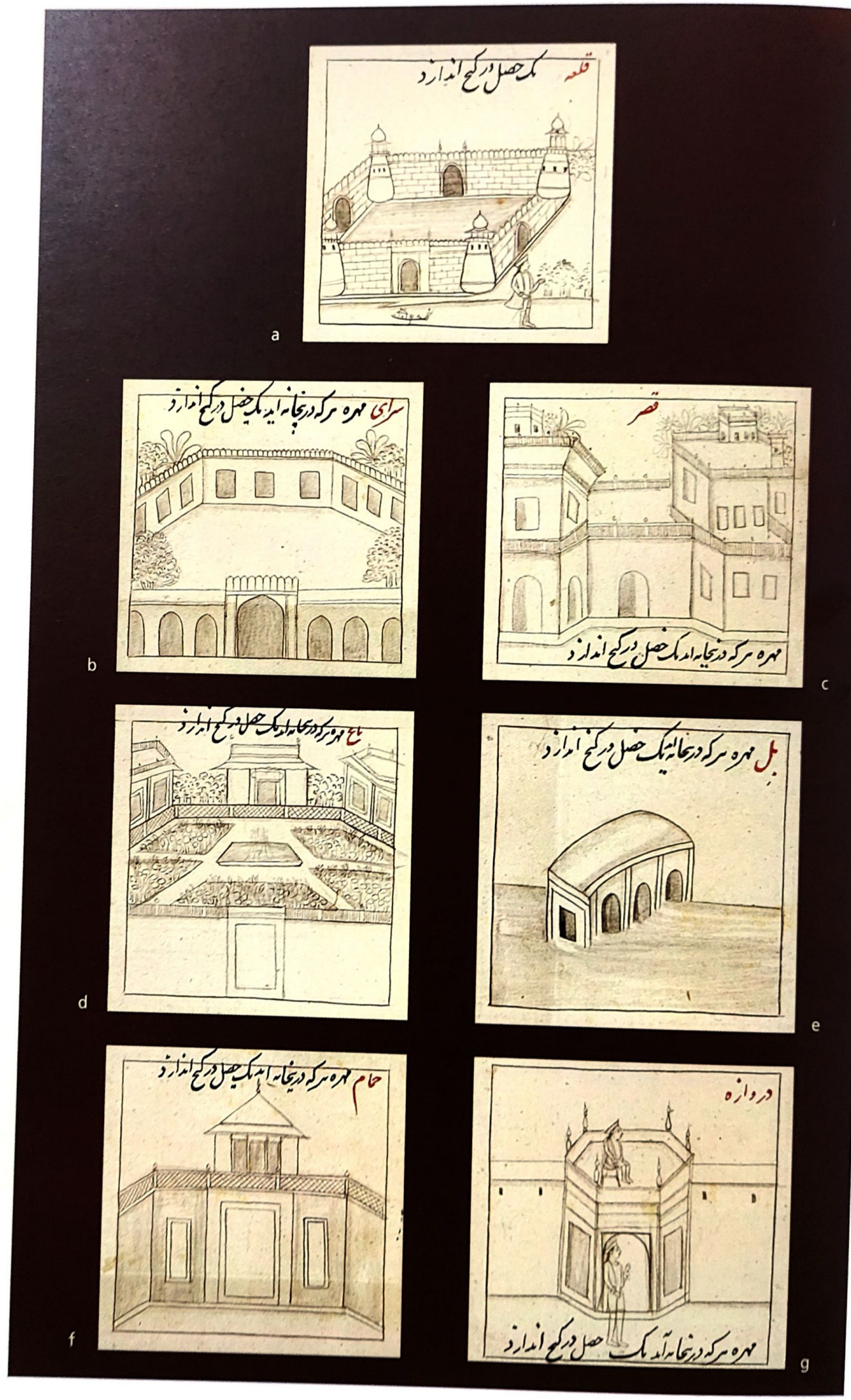




When commissioning designs for this and other local games,[4] the "Nabob" Johnson thought that he was collecting essentially ethnographic information about Indian pastimes. However the game of ganj is closely related to a game played in Europe from the 16th century onwards called "The Royal Game of Goose". At least one observer in Mughal India, Muhammad A'zam in the *Bayaz-i Khwushbu'i* of 1698 (discussed below), called ganj a "European game" (*bazi-e firangi*). Moreover, "Goose" itself, as I have argued elsewhere,[5] may well have been introduced into Europe from the Islamic world of Western Asia in the 16th century; and further interesting problems arise regarding the name of the game, and when and in what form it was introduced into India and elaborated there. There is evidence from Muhammad A'zam's account of a European 17th-century transmission of the game to India, but the rules of play and iconography of the ganj boards (of which the only pictorial illustration now known is that of the Johnson Album) differ considerably from the usual European boards for "Goose". The name of ganj may in fact be correctly preserved upon the Lucknow board, and the name of the "Game of Goose" current in some European



2a. The Game of Treasure (ganj). Lucknow, c. 1784, commissioned by Richard Johnson. Watercolour and ink on paper; 50.5 x 51 cm. The British Library, London (India Office Collections). Photograph courtesy of The British Library.



5a–g. *Details of buildings and gardens:*
(a) Fort 27; (b) Serai 41; (c) Palace 51; (d) Garden 47; (e) Bridge 23; (f) Hammam 43; (g) Gateway 29.

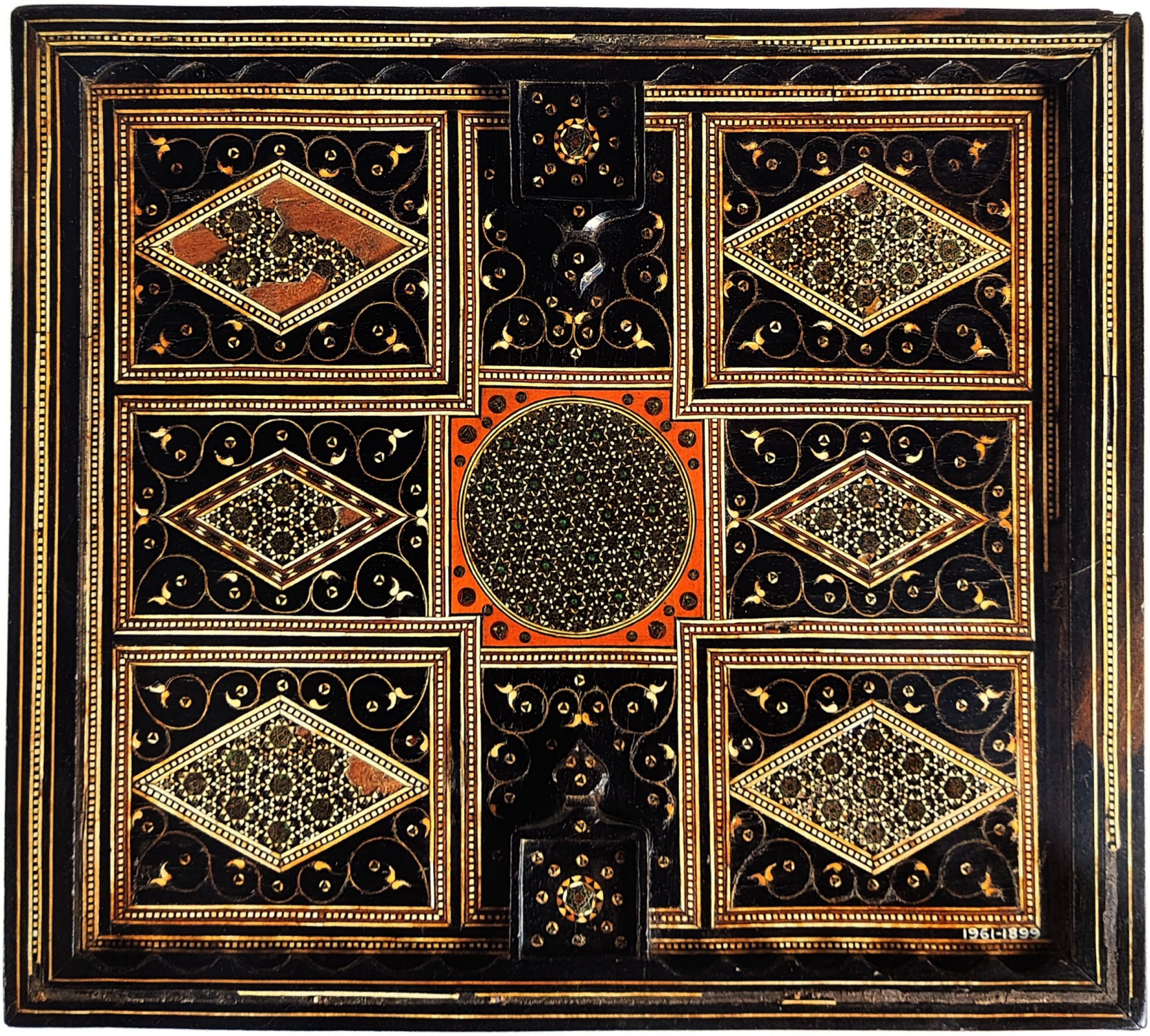
2. Pachisi board. India, 19th century. Silk and velvet; 50 x 49.5 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I.S. 6064).

It is perhaps because early Indian games boards were made of light and portable materials that so few have survived; the earliest Indian boards currently known are those made for Western patrons and fashioned from wood and other similarly durable materials.[1] It was not long after the arrival of Europeans in the subcontinent that local craftsmen began producing Western-style goods to sell them. Chessboards and chessmen seem to have been among the first luxury goods fashioned specifically for European tastes. On his visit to Gujarat in the early 16th century – only a few years after Vasco da Gama's landing in India – Duarte Barbosa (d. 1521) observed that "A great quantity of ivory is used here in very cunning work, inlaid and turned articles such as bracelets, sword-hilts, dice, chessmen and chess-boards."[2] With their rich traditions of wood and ivory work, Gujarat and Sindh became a significant centre of furniture-making for the European market, and contemporary travellers suggest that games boards were part of this production. Among the goods offered for sale at Cambay, Dutch merchant Jan Huygen van Linschoten (1563–1611) observed "fine playing tables, and

Chessebordes of Ivory",[3] and his compatriot Francisco Pelsaert (d. 1630) recorded that in Sindh "draughtboards, writing cases and similar goods are manufactured locally in large quantities".[4]

A reversible games board in the Victoria and Albert Museum, made in Gujarat or Sindh in the 16th century, may be of the type seen by early European travellers in the region (figure 3). Were it not for the use of tropical woods in its manufacture, this particular piece might well have been made in Italy, so closely does its aesthetic conform with examples of woodwork produced there in the "Veneto-Saracenic" style.[5] This board is configured on one side with divisions for tric-trac, an ancestor of modern-day backgammon, and on the other with alternating squares of ebony and ivory for chess. Both sides are veneered with materials highly prized in Europe: ebony and ivory, embellished with *sadeli*, a micro-mosaic of woods and metals arranged in geometric patterns. *Sadeli* has been in use since antiquity, but is particularly associated with West Asia, whence it spread, both west to Italy, and east to Persia and India.[6] The Italian variety was known as *alla certosina*,

3a and b (*overleaf*). Reversible games board. Gujarat or Sindh, 16th century. Teak, veneered with ebony and citronwood, inlaid with ivory and *sadeli* work; 32.5 x 29.2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (1961-1899).



diplomatic gifts of the highest level. One such example is a reversible games board in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, which is embellished with later European eglomisé (gold leaf on glass) discs. One of these depicts the coat of arms of the Polish Count of Tenczin and bears the inscription "I.C.A.T.C.V." (Ioannes Comes A Tenczin Castellanus Voiniczensis) and date 1571.[11] The rare dating provides a terminus ante quem for the production of the board, a date supported by the existence of archival references to Indian mother-of-pearl games boards. For example, between 1577 and 1580 the Portuguese offered the Sultan of Morocco a number of Indian objects, including "two mother-of-pearl chessboards and draughts decorated in the corners with silver".[12] In 1572 Cardinal Francesco de Medici sent Albrecht V of Bavaria "*untavolere da giocare cosposta di madreperla al Indiana*" (a games table made of mother-of-pearl in the Indian style).[13] Indian mother-of-pearl games boards also appear in some number in the 1598 inventory of the ducal *Kunstkammer* of the Dukes of Bavaria.[14]

As a form of recreation, board games are often played while travelling, as a way of passing the time. This was especially so for Europeans in Asia, who sometimes spent their entire careers continually moving from post to post, or transiting between trading stations. Indeed, so characteristic were board games of Portuguese life in the East, that Japanese illustrations of these foreigners regularly depict them at play.[15] Given that the consumers of games boards made in India led transitory lives, it made sense that boards themselves should be multi-purpose and as compact as possible. Boards were typically designed for playing more than one

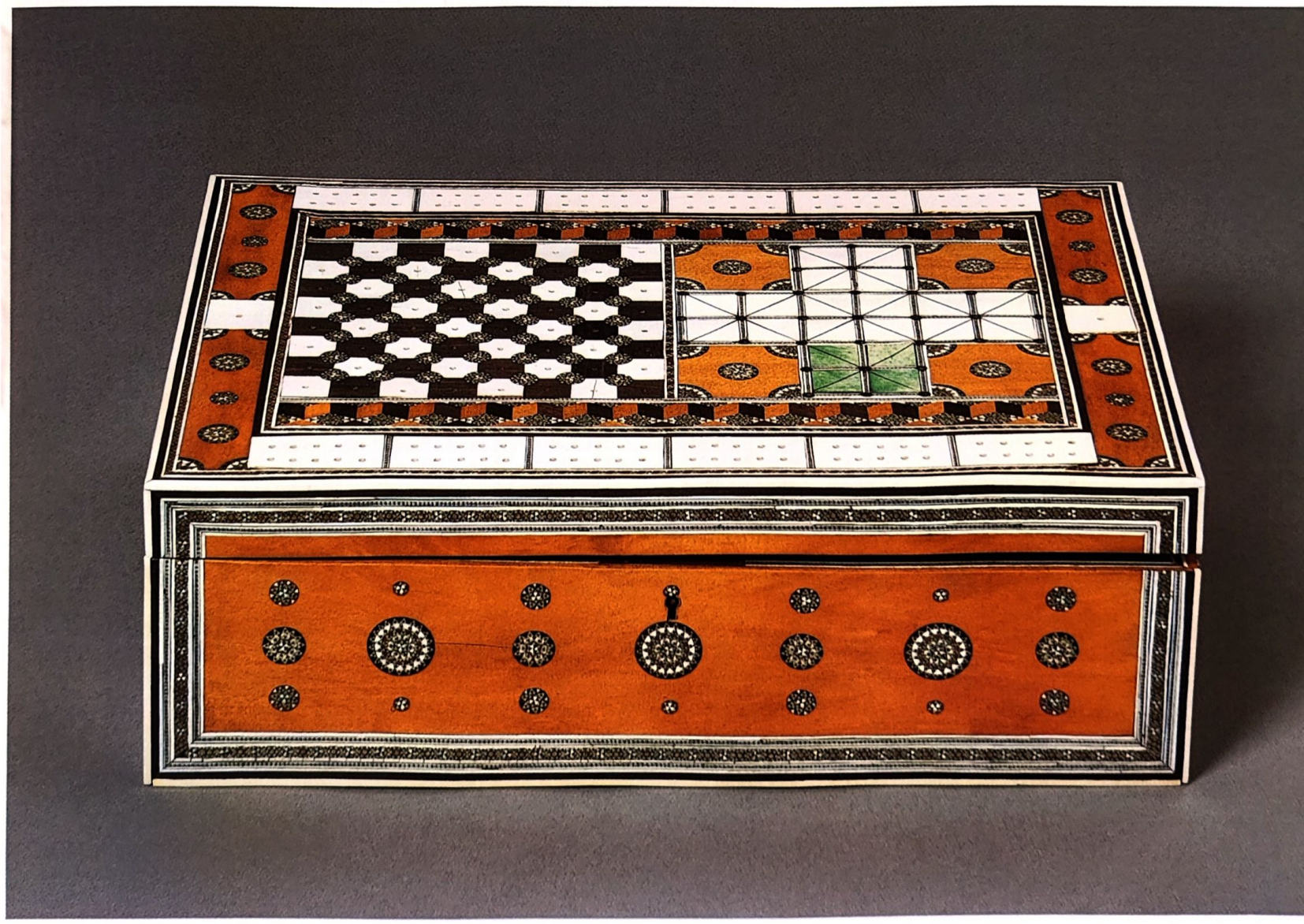
4a and b. Games board for chess, backgammon, and *barato*. Western India, 17th century. Padouk, veneered with rosewood, inlaid with ivory and ebony, the figure of solid ivory, carved. Private collection.

after the Certosa (Charterhouse) of Pavia, one of many places where such work was executed.[7]

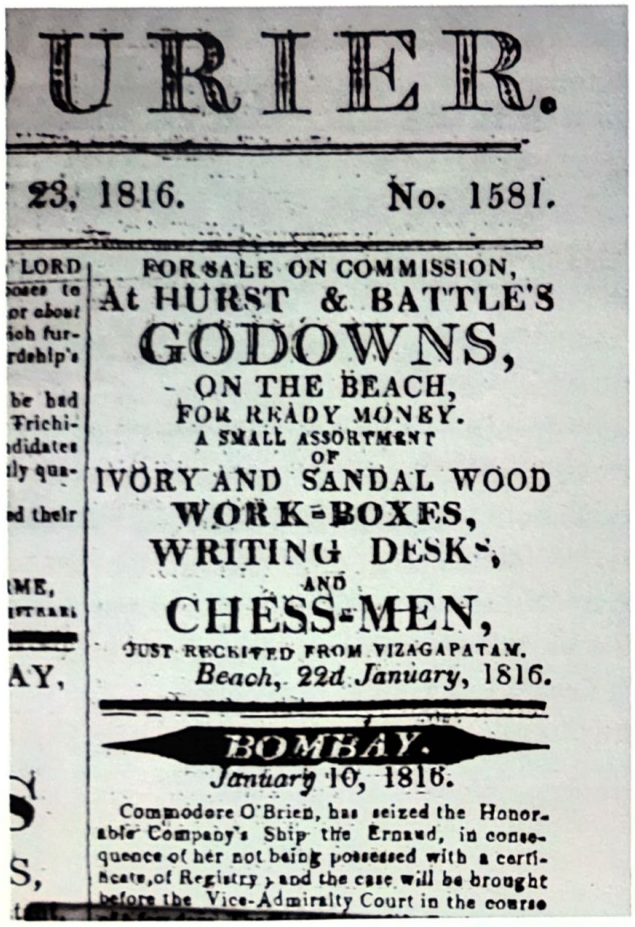
Gujarat was also renowned for luxury goods made from or embellished with plaques of mother-of-pearl. The principal appeal of mother-of-pearl, a substance found in thin layers on the inside of certain shells (most particularly *Turbo marmoratus*), lay in its lustrous and iridescent surface. Gujarat is first mentioned as the centre of mother-of-pearl work in 1502, in which year the King of Melinde, on the East Coast of Africa, presented Vasco da Gama with "a bedstead of Cambay, wrought with gold and mother of pearl, a very beautiful thing".[8] Indian mother-of-pearl objects are also recorded in European royal collections. A list made in 1522 of Manuel I of Portugal's (1469–1521) wardrobe included, among other things, "a casket from India inlaid with mother-of-pearl with eighteen sheets of silver".[9] Although caskets and various types of vessels seem to have constituted the majority of the output, games boards were also made, as Linschoten also noted.[10] Such pieces were clearly prized in Europe, where they were collected and exchanged as

"beautiful things we saw there, such as chess men, boxes, palanquins, puzzles, paper-cutters".[23] The Behrampur and Murshidabad sets which are most noted for their originality are those in which Indian princes and their armies rival East India Company troops. The Victoria and Albert Museum possesses an intricately carved Behrampur set, in which a Muslim prince and his court compete against his Hindu counterpart (figure 10).

The growth of British settlement in India in the 19th century, and the subsequent development of tourism, provided Indian craftsmen with a substantial new market for their wares. This period saw the wholesale production of Western-style objects in India by artisans who recognized both a decline in traditional patronage and the potential of European consumers. The exhibitions of arts and manufactures staged from the mid-19th century onwards simultaneously stimulated Western interest in Indian art and craft, with a result that throughout India artisans began to produce easily transportable and relatively inexpensive "novelty" wares to feed European demands for examples of their work. These commonly included envelope and glove boxes, letter racks and letter openers, trays, jewellery cases, and games boxes. Such goods were configured to be of use to Europeans while showcasing traditional Indian craftsmanship, whether in hardstone or ivory inlay, painting, lac-turnery, papier-mâché, lacquering, and wood-carving. Objects intended for exhibitions were especially designed to reflect the varied skills of Indian craftsmen. A multi-purpose games box of this type in the Victoria and Albert Museum was made in Calcutta, but using techniques traditionally from western India (figure 11).



11. Games board and writing box. Calcutta, c. 1855 or c. 1867. Rosewood, veneered with sandalwood, inlaid with ebony, ivory, and *sadeli* work; 31 x 23 cm, height: 10 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum (I.S. 02264).



URIER.

23, 1816. No. 1581.

FOR SALE ON COMMISSION,
At HURST & BATTLE'S
GODOWNS,
ON THE BEACH,
FOR READY MONEY.
A SMALL ASSORTMENT
OF
IVORY AND SANDAL WOOD
WORK-BOXES,
WRITING DESKS,
AND
CHESS-MEN,
JUST RECEIVED FROM VIZAGAPATAM.
Beach, 22d January, 1816.

BOMBAY.
January 10, 1816.

Commodore O'Brien, has seized the Honorable Company's Ship the Ernaud, in consequence of her not being possessed with a certificate, of Registry; and the case will be brought before the Vice-Admiralty Court in the course

examples travelled further afield. A folding board in a private London collection bears an inscription explaining that it was given to the American politician George Hay (1765–1830) by his friend C.P. Hay in 1819.

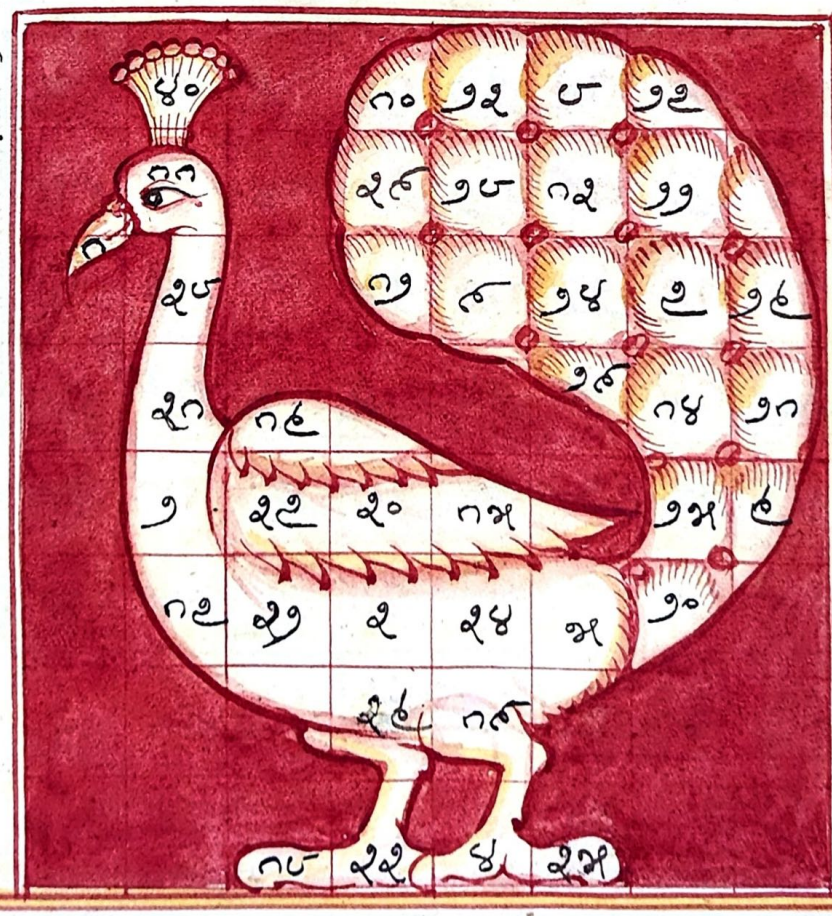
Vishakhapatnam was also a leading centre for the production of ivory chessmen for Western consumption, which could be purchased in situ, but were also exported for sale at major settlements in British India (figure 9). These varied in style and design, but were typically based on contemporary European chess pieces. More elaborate chessmen were made in Bengal, at Murshidabad and the nearby town of Behrampur, both leading centres of ivory carving which enjoyed considerable European patronage. Behrampur was a regular stopping point for Europeans travelling into "Upper India". Arriving there in 1836, Fanny Parks recalled that "the budgerow was instantly crowded with people, bringing carved ivory toys, chessmen, elephants etc. for sale".[22] Isabella Fane was there in the same year and also recorded the

9. Advertisement for Vishakhapatnam chessmen: *Madras Courier*, January 23, 1816.

10. Chess set. Behrampur, early 19th century. Ivory, carved. Victoria and Albert Museum (I.S. 01218).

ಯೂ ೬೪ ಮನೆ ಚತುರಂಗ ಚಕ್ರದಲ್ಲಿ ೨೬ ಮನೆ ಬಿಷ್ಟು ನಿಂತ ೩೮ ಮನೆಗೆ
ಸುಕಾಕಾರ ಮಾಗಿ ಚಿತ್ರೆ
ಕಾಶ್ಚಗತಿನ ಡಶಿರುವಯೂ
ಚಕ್ರಕ್ಕೆಲಿ ದಲ್ಲಿ ೬ ಆಗುತ್ರೆ

ಯೂ ೬೪ ಮನೆ ಚತುರಂಗ ಚಕ್ರದಲ್ಲಿ ೨೪ ಮನೆ ಬಿಷ್ಟು ನಿಂತ ೪೦ ಮನೆಗೆ ಮಯೂರಾಕಾರ ಮಾಗಿ ಚಿ



ತ್ರೆ ಕಾಶ್ಚಗತಿ ಯಂನ ಡಶಿ ರುವಯೂ ಚಕ್ರಕ್ಕೆಲಿದಾ ಲಂ ಆಗುತ್ರಾ ಯಿದ್ದೆ

one square; horse moves as the knight; and flag moves to the third square diagonally. The pawns or soldiers advance forward, left, or right only one square at a time.

This expanded design may be considered one of the Maharaja's most notable creations in the chess tradition. Although it has not gained much notice hitherto, it may perhaps be of interest to modern students of chess. The object of the game is to gain control over the opponent and to block his power of movement. The game is thus called *balabali*, meaning a reduced form of warfare in which one's strength is displayed. In this board arrangement, some pieces work together particularly well and deploying them in combination adds considerably to the force of the player's army as a whole.[7] In his commentary, Krishnaraja has not fully explained the workings of the game, but he offers insights into its spiritual symbolism and its astrological relation to the positions and motions of the zodiac.

Mural paintings

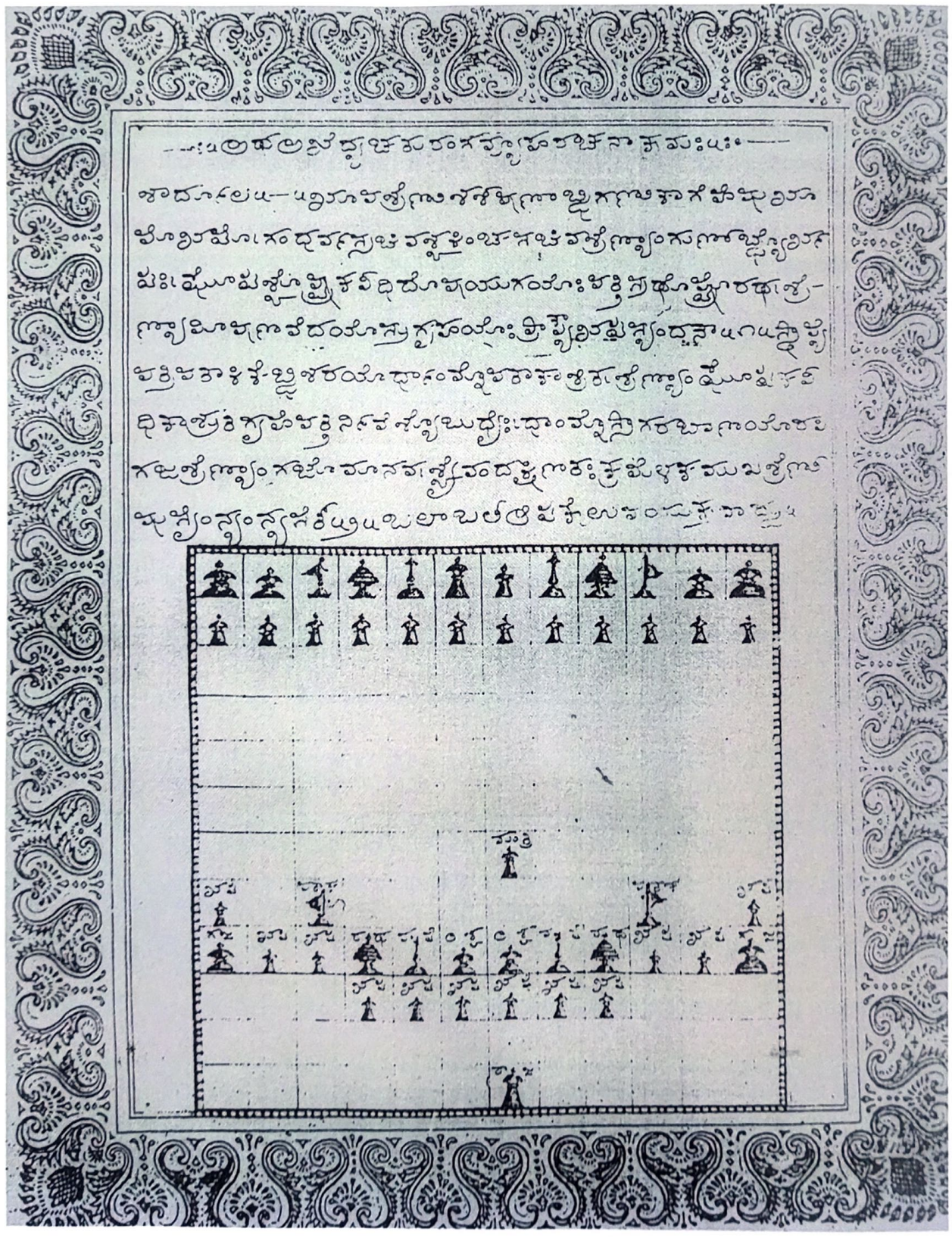
The Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery's extraordinary group of wall paintings from Krishnaraja's reign, showing a huge variety of board games and puzzles, has also survived largely unnoticed until the present day (figure 4). They adorn the walls of a room in the former Jaganmohana Palace, where the Raja presumably sat and passed the time playing games, or inventing and refining them. Many visitors who miss out this final room on the top floor of the building would be amazed to see its richly coloured mural representations of a large number of game boards of 6 x 6, 8 x 8, 10 x 10, or 12 x 12 squares. The total painted surface area amounts to about 280 square metres.

The diverse subject matter includes small portraits and figurative scenes or decorative panels with floral, vegetal, and animal designs, as well as the game boards or puzzle diagrams which predominate in their

4. Mural paintings, incorporating board games and puzzles, in the former Jaganmohana Palace. Mysore, c. 1861. Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, Mysore.

corresponding to a number. In order to denote the column and row, the terminology of the Indian calendar has also been used, with the names of the months denoting the rows and names of stars the columns, to obtain the 108 names of the god (Shiva, Maheshvara, Shambhu, and so forth).

An example of the Raja's inventions of developed forms of existing games is his 12 x 12-square expanded board design for chess (figure 3). In this game the pieces are set up initially thus, on the first and twelfth ranks: elephants on first and twelfth squares; horses on second and eleventh; flags on third and tenth; chariots on fourth and ninth; camel on fifth and eighth; raja (king) on sixth; minister on seventh. Pawns occupy the entire second and eleventh ranks. The rules (in relation to modern chess) are: raja moves as king; minister as queen; elephant as bishop; chariot moves to the fourth square, in four directions; camel moves diagonally

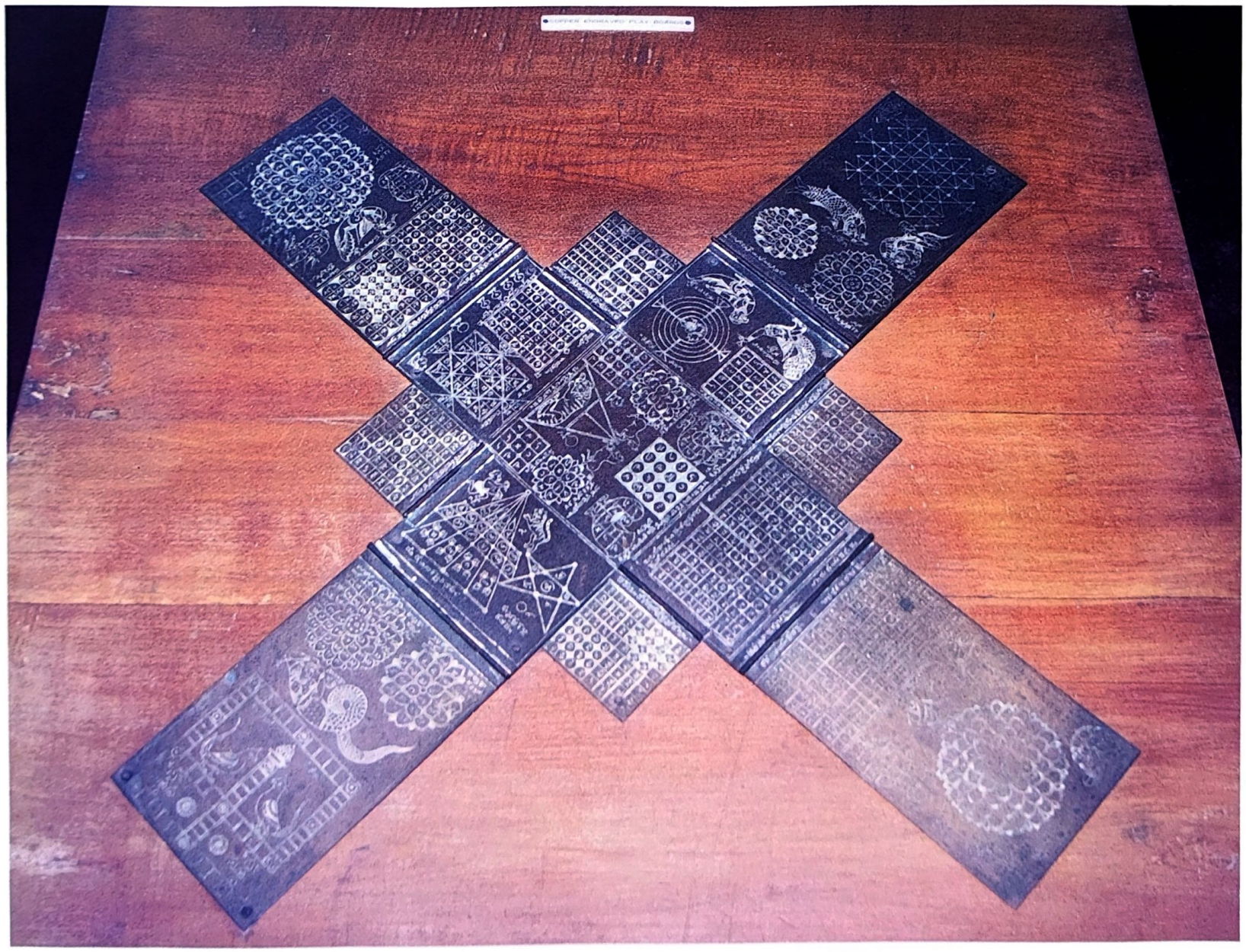


3. Manuscript page with a 12 x 12 expanded chessboard design. Mysore, mid-19th century. Ink on paper; 18 x 24 cm. Private collection, Bangalore.

central rectangular compartments. Many types of board game are represented, including pachisi and its local variants devised by Krishnaraja, as well as knight's tour puzzles, magic squares,[8] cryptograms, anagrams, and acrostics. These rich and complex mural compositions present visually pleasing, patterned designs, showing the prominent images of animals or geometrical shapes depicted within their grids. In this respect, they parallel the hand-drawn images of game boards collected in the manuscripts (see figures 1–3). The elaborate mural composition in figure 4 is arranged round the central image of a prancing horse, a reflection both of Krishnaraja's love of horses and his fascination with the mysteries of the knight's (or horse's) tour puzzle. Some of the game boards depicted elsewhere in these murals, such as Devisayujyam and Shivasayujyam,[9] are race games which are also expressions of religious philosophy, based on the karma principle like Snakes and Ladders, and thus intended to direct the thoughts of their players towards higher things.

Inscribed brass plates

Also among the collections of the Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery is a remarkable group of incised brass plates, inscribed with diverse grids and patterns for board games or knight's tour diagrams, with numbers and notes giving rules and further observations (figure 5). These again represent, as it were, versions in metal of the corresponding pages from the royal games manuscripts. More than one set of these plates was made, but this full set preserved at Mysore has the extraordinary feature that



5. Inscribed brass plates with various board games and puzzles, linked in a cruciform board pattern. Mysore, mid-19th century. 120 x 120 cm. Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, Mysore.

all of the plates are hinged together, so as to form, when fully opened, the shape of a large cruciform or pachisi-type game. Individual examples of these engraved brass or copper sheets were also made at Mysore, and a group of 23 such sheets is now in the British Museum.[10]

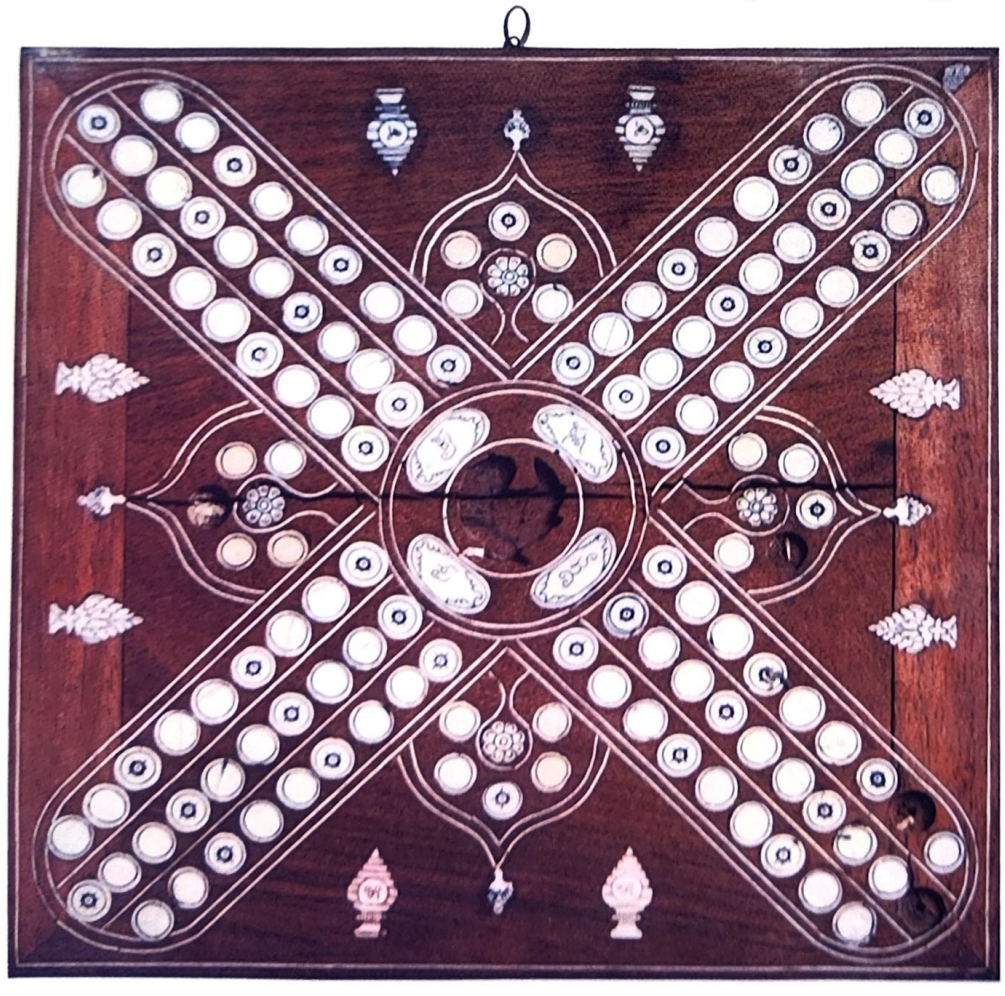
Game boards and pieces

A number of fine-quality boards together with dice and pieces, no doubt once used for play or experimentation by Maharaja Krishnaraja himself, are also preserved in the Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery. These boards are for various games, not least pachisi and its expanded forms, which seem to have been the Raja's favourites. Along with specimens of the standard, four-armed pachisi board are various examples of the Raja's developed versions of the game, with six, eight, twelve, and even sixteen arms.

A favoured style of board at the court was a dark rosewood panel with its playing grid inlaid in ivory, with incised and coloured patterns, inscriptions, or pictorial imagery. Such boards are often hinged for folding, or furnished with a ring for suspension. The inlaid wood pachisi board in figure 6 shows a form of the game with 28 cells in each of the four arms. Five additional cells, appearing at each of the four interstices of the arms, are probably the starting squares for each player's men or pieces. The game was played with five pieces and three rectangular dice. An ivory figure of a *hamsa* or sacred goose at the centre of the board is now missing, but its outline can be seen. A more developed, twelve-armed pachisi board (figure 7), resembling an opened lotus flower, has 12 x 12 or 144 cells in all. Its twelve arms or petals are grouped around the twelve signs of the zodiac and other planetary symbols at the centre, lending a cosmic or astrological dimension to the game.

For some of these games, alternative examples are also found in the Art Gallery's collection, lavishly embroidered on silk or velvet. Some were also painted on glass, such as another developed version of a four-armed pachisi board (figure 8). Here the pictures and Kannada inscriptions within the squares relate to karmic philosophy and instruct the player how to move his pieces, either forward or backward, in response to the good or bad karma represented by each square. Often in such karmic versions of pachisi, the four castes (brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra) are represented by the four arms, while the images on the board represent the higher or lower states of existence that the players attain in turn, such as fish, animal, or human incarnations.[11] The central section of this board is now missing.

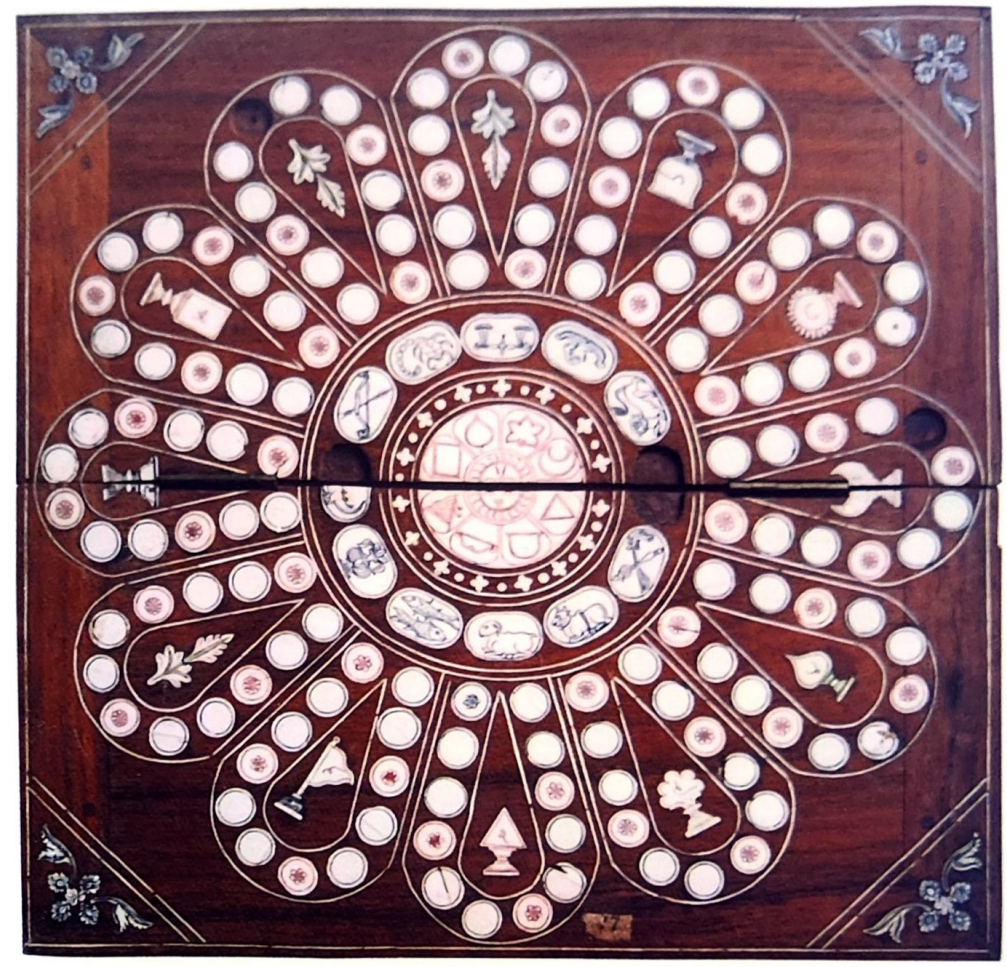
Over the years a number of examples of games from Krishnaraja's court have become dispersed, outstanding among them the games compendium in the form of an elaborate folding box, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.[12] Its multiple inlaid game boards include chess, pachisi, and mancala (the last a game of African origin), as well as various hunt games of the Tiger and Men type. Examples of hunt games are also seen, together with simple magic square



6. Four-armed pachisi board. Mysore, mid-19th century. Rosewood with ivory inlay; 48 x 48 cm. Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, Mysore.

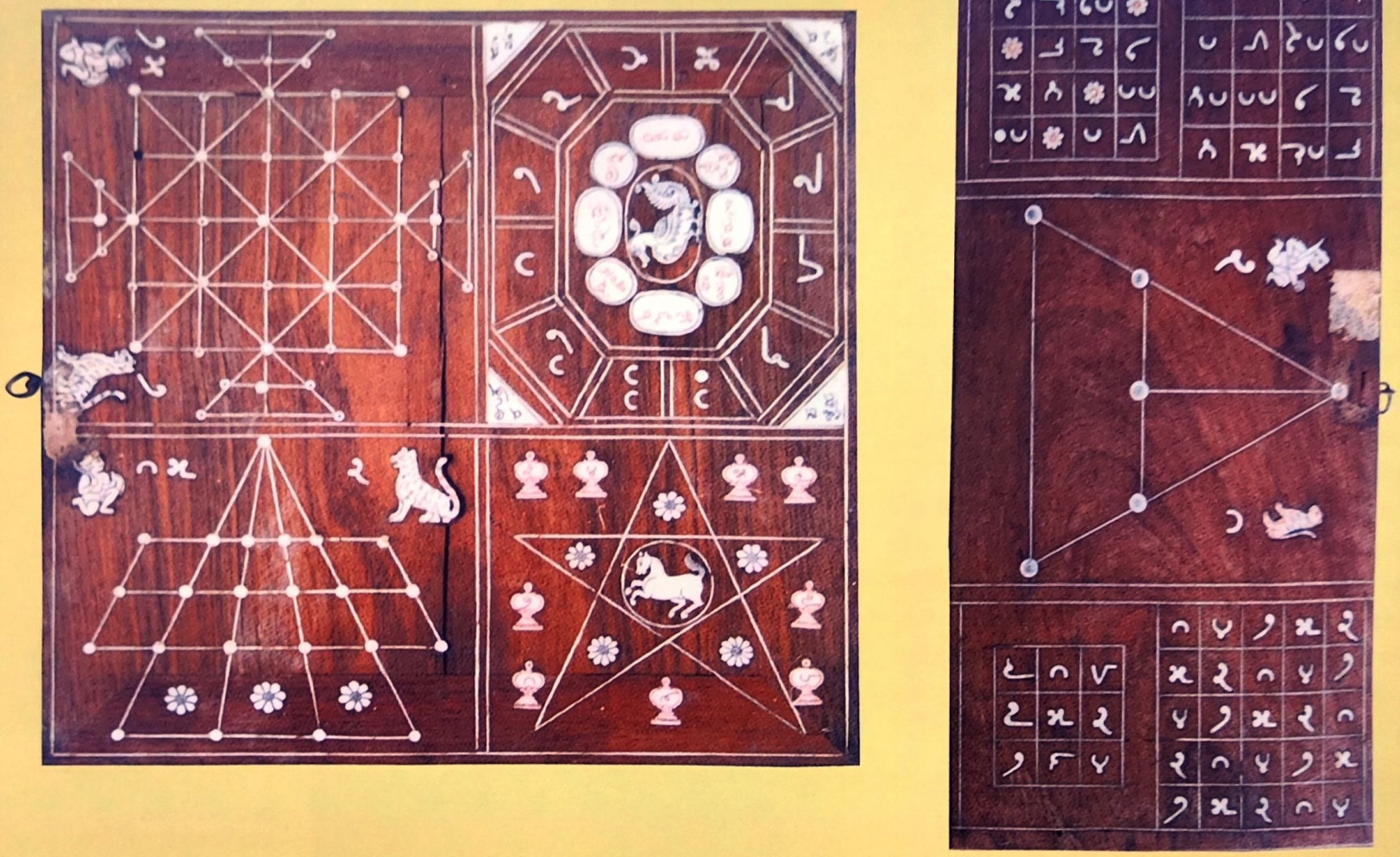
designs, in two inlaid rosewood boards in the Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery (figure 9).

Finally, a varied group of ivory dice dating from Krishnaraja's reign is illustrated here (figure 10). At top left is a 12-sided die or dodecahedron, composed of 12 regular pentagons forming together a spheroid shape: the Raja's interest in the number 12 lay in its many uses in numerology, astrology, and astronomy, as in the 12-fold divisions of the hours, months, signs of the zodiac, etc.[13] At top right is a traditional, four-sided rectangular cuboid die. On either side below are four-sided and octahedral spinning dice, which are set in motion by spinning the handle. In addition to the numbers 1–4 or 1–8, each of the four or eight sides is marked with Kannada characters for the four and eight directions. Between these is a spherical ivory die, based on a hexagonal cylinder. A ball inside this hollow object



7. Twelve-armed (12 x 12) pachisi board with astrological symbols. Mysore, mid-19th century. Rosewood with ivory inlay; 48 x 48 cm. Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, Mysore.

8. Karmic, four-armed pachisi board. Mysore, mid-19th century. Painted and inscribed on glass with wooden backing; 50 x 50 cm. Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, Mysore.



9. Boards with various hunt games of Tiger and Men type and simple magic squares. Mysore, mid-19th century. Rosewood with ivory inlay; 48 x 48 cm. Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, Mysore.

10. Ivory dice of various types. Mysore, mid-19th century. Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, Mysore.

moves when it is thrown, and stops the die rolling when it falls into one of six interior sockets. The score can then be read by counting the visible spikes on the die's upper surface.

NOTES

[1] *Chaturanga Sarasarvasvam* MS, fols. 664–65; *Chaturanga Chamatkrita Chakramanjari* MS, fol. 248.

[2] For brief accounts, see R. Vasantha, "Deciphering the board games invented by the Raja of Mysore", in J. Retschitzki and R. Haddad-Zubel, eds., *Step by step: Proceedings of the Fourth Colloquium "Board Games in Academia"*, Fribourg, 2002, pp. 147–62; and I.L. Finkel, "A Raja's diversions: Board games at Mysore", in C. Mackenzie and I.L. Finkel, eds., *Asian games: The art of contest*, New York, 2004, pp. 127–33.

[3] In a German private collection: the present writer is preparing a full publication of this manuscript.

[4] Finkel, "A Raja's diversions", pls. 11: 2 a–b.

[5] The tour of a knight over an otherwise empty chessboard, visiting each square once only: there is almost an infinite number of ways of achieving this and more than 122,000,000 ways of performing the more restricted version known as the re-entrant tour, in which the knight on its 64th move returns to its starting square. Among Krishnaraja's innovations in this field is his 8 x 8 semi–magic square formed by a re-entrant knight's tour, which he describes as a "*Purnakalpataru* [wish-fulfilling tree]" (for contemporary printed examples see Topsfield, "Some Mysore games in British collections" in this volume, figs. 4 and 5). This is a semi-magic square (i.e. the sums of the long diagonals are not constant), and the knight's tour which forms it possesses additional structural properties, such as symmetry and containing within itself smaller magic tours as component elements. The sum of the numbers in each 2 x 2 block is 130; in each 4 x 2 block, 260; in each 8 x 2 block, 520; in each 16 x 2 block, 1040; in each 32 x 2 block, 2080; among other numerical properties. Still more remarkable is the Raja's 12 x 12 magic knight's tour, formed on the squares and diamonds principle and the earliest known magic knight's tour on a board larger than 8 x 8. The existence of this tour was unknown to the games scholar H.J.R. Murray (1868–1955), author of *The magic knight's tours, a mathematical recreation* (manuscript, 1951). No other magic knight's tour on a board larger than 8 x 8 was known until 1885, when M. Wihnyk published a 16 x 16 example, and the 12 x 12 knight's tour was not known in the West until 1932 when E. Lange added a border to an 8 x 8 tour.

[6] A cryptogram is a type of word puzzle in which a short piece of text is given, encrypted with a simple substitution cipher in which each letter is replaced by a different letter. To solve this puzzle, one must recover the plain text; this is usually done by frequency analysis and by recognizing letter patterns in words.

[7] Krishnaraja describes a board array called "Garuda Vyuha" and discusses the positioning of pieces to block the opponent: with minister confronting the raja at f7, camel at d5 and d8, chariot at d4 and d9, flag at e3 and e10, the horse and chariot at equal distance from the minister maintaining a balanced force, and the pawns at c4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

[8] Mathematical puzzle in which a series of consecutive numbers is arranged to form a square pattern, so that the numbers on each file, rank, or long diagonal add up to the same total.

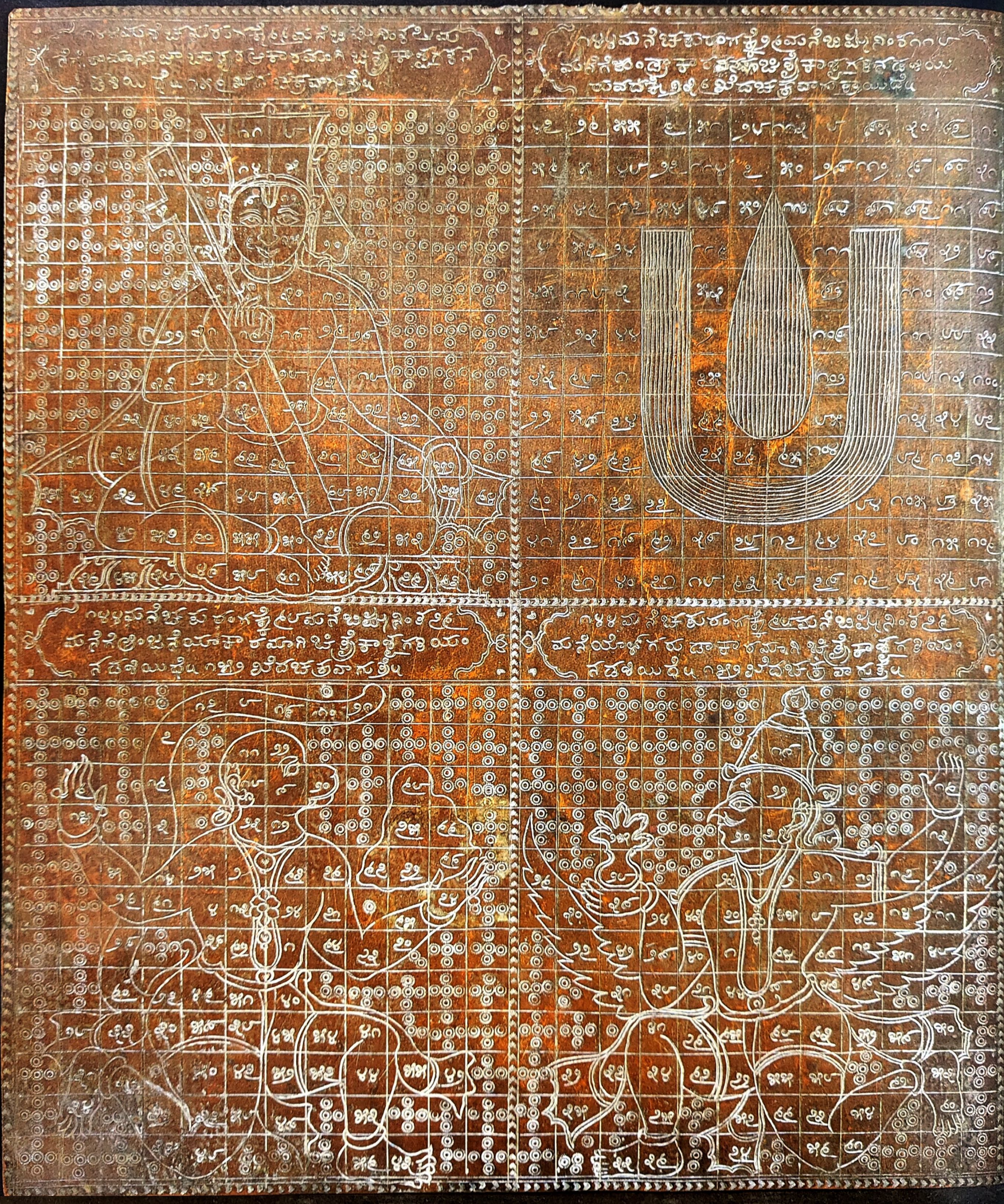
[9] Topsfield, "Some Mysore games", figs. 7 and 8, for examples of these games in wood with ivory inlay.

[10] Finkel, "A Raja's diversions", pls. 11: 3a–c; also Topsfield, "Some Mysore games", fig. 1.

[11] Compare Finkel, "A Raja's diversions", pl. 11: 4.

[12] Ibid., pl. 11: 5; also A. Jaffer, "The furniture of play" in the present volume, fig. 1, and Topsfield, "Some Mysore games", figs. 8a–d.

[13] A duodecimal (as opposed to the now current decimal) numbering system was in use in India in antiquity and is referred to in Puranic literature. In commerce also, a certain preference for the number 12 still exists, with the calculation of quantities in dozens and grosses. It is not surprising therefore that the Raja had a predilection for developing 12-sided boards, for 12 players, with specially marked 12-sided dice.



SOME MYSORE GAMES
IN BRITISH COLLECTIONS

ANDREW TOPSFIELD

A scion of the ancient Wodeyar dynasty, the five-year-old Maharaja Krishnaraja III was restored to the throne of Mysore by the British in 1799 after the fall of Tipu Sultan. At his enthronement and in later years, the youthful raja impressed British observers with his dignified and decorous manner.[1] In 1811, aged seventeen, Krishnaraja assumed full ruling powers, hitherto exercised by the dependable elderly minister Purnaiya. Unfortunately he had by this time come under the sway of self-seeking flatterers and opportunists, who led him into years of extravagance and misgovernment. In 1831 the British intervened and divested Krishnaraja of power. While he possessed, in their view, "many amiable qualities" and "great natural intelligence", he lacked "the administrative ability which was essential for governing the country".[2] Thus relieved of royal duties, yet retaining a fifth of the state revenues for his own expenditure, the now titular maharaja was still able to practise "the princely liberality which formed one of the main elements of his character", especially in the form of artistic patronage and religious endowments.[3]

A retrospective (or even posthumous) portrait of Krishnaraja, painted in a Mysore style of c. 1860–75, seems to show him in early middle age, perhaps around the time of his deposition (figure 2). He is seated on an ivory chair of European type in a vividly coloured interior, with an imported lamp fitting prominent on the wall behind. It may be compared with a photographic portrait of the 1860s, in which the Raja in his final years poses in full court dress on an elaborate ivory throne (figure 3).

1. Brass plate with four numerical or knight's tour puzzles depicting Ramanuja, *urdhvapundra* mark, Hanuman, and Garuda. Mysore, mid-19th century. Approx. 38 x 30.5 cm. British Museum, London.

From the 1830s, the once wayward Krishnaraja evidently matured into a highly cultivated personality, distinguished for his intellect, learning, and piety ("he excelled in astrology and was a great proficient in the mantras"), while also retaining a playful sense of humour. He is remembered as "a clever person... refined in demeanour. His conversation was generally seasoned by shrewd and sarcastic remarks. He was fond of jokes and it is said he kept at his court a professional Joker..."[4] This unusual combination of a highly developed sense of play with the Raja's serious interests in religious philosophy, mathematics, numerology, and astrology found expression in his enduring predilection for inventing complex symbolic games and puzzles. For almost four decades until Krishnaraja's death in 1868 at the age of 74, he enjoyed abundant leisure for playing, elaborating, and inventing board and card games, or devising ingenious mathematical puzzles of the knight's tour type. As has been described elsewhere,[5] he also left an unusually detailed record of these diverse games creations, above all in the encyclopaedic manuscript treatises which were copiously illustrated by his court artists. The diagrams and descriptions of games in these volumes moreover had their counterparts in other media such as mural paintings, engraved sheets of brass, or printed versions on cloth or paper. The Raja presumably wished both to publish them more widely and to preserve them for posterity.

Much of this heritage, as has been seen, is still preserved in the collections at Mysore. Within the Raja's lifetime, however, at least a few of his games creations had become more widely known, partly it seems through his own initiatives. Some examples had even begun to reach Britain. These earliest exports of Mysore games and puzzles to the West form the subject of this article, together with one or two additional examples, apparently dispersed from the Mysore royal collections in the second half of the 20th century, which have also entered British public or private collections.[6]

Knight's tour presentation cloths

It is likely that Maharaja Krishnaraja might have welcomed this dispersal of some at least of his games and writings, in which he took such pride. He himself made efforts to publish them, using the current technology of lithographic printing; nowadays he would no doubt have set up a website. They are among the varied productions of the press which he installed in the Ambavilas Palace, to print copies of his selected writings for presentation to dignitaries and scholars.

Contemporary lithographed examples of the Raja's games and puzzles include not only manuscript texts or single sheet productions on paper, but also handkerchief-sized rectangles of white or yellow satin (backed with a south Indian mixed cotton and silk *mashru* fabric) which are printed with chessboard diagrams showing examples of his knight's tour creations. In some cases these designs were produced in several language versions, including English, Hindi, and Urdu, as well as the local Kannada. Often the Raja would present these printed cloths to visitors and acquaintances, as noted by Colonel Meadows Taylor: "...He was esteemed a fine chess player, and one of his amusements was to compose chess problems, which were printed upon yellow satin and

2. (*opposite*) Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III and a courtier, around 1830. Mysore, c. 1860–75. Gouache on paper. Collection of Sir Howard Hodgkin, London.

3. Photograph of Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar in old age. After Forbes Watson and Kaye, eds., *The People of India* (1875), vol. 8.

Digby, and Hopewell in this volume.

[13] Mr Morrison was then Principal of Newington College, Madras; I am indebted for this information to his daughter Miss C.L. Morrison, former Fellow of St Anne's College, Oxford. This ganjifa pack, which remains in family possession, shows some iconographic variations in its court cards (Raja and Minister) from the otherwise similar dasvatara ganjifa by the same artist in the Victoria and Albert Museum: R. von Leyden, *Ganjifa: The playing cards of India*, London, 1982, no. 25, pp. 100–02.

[14] I.L. Finkel, "Dice in India and beyond", in Mackenzie and Finkel, eds., *Asian games*; E.J.H. Mackay, *Early Indus Civilizations*, London, 1948, pp. 137–40; G.F. Dales, "Of dice and men", repr. in G. Possehl, ed., *Ancient cities of the Indus*, New Delhi, 1979.

[15] I.L. Finkel, "The World Conqueror emerges: Backgammon in Persia", in Mackenzie and Finkel, eds., *Asian games*, pp. 94–95.

[16] I.L. Finkel, "The sedentary games of India: An introduction", in N. Ray and A. Ghosh, eds., *Sedentary games of India*, Calcutta, 1999, pp. 2–12, for a concise account.

[17] Tr. A. Basham, *The wonder that was India*, 3rd ed., London, 1967, pp. 403–05; W.D. O'Flaherty, *The Rig Veda*, Harmondsworth, 1981, pp. 239–42, for another version.

[18] E.g. Col. J. Tod, writing c. 1820 in his *Annals and antiquities of Rajasthan*, ed. W. Crooke, repr. Delhi, 1971, vol. 2, p. 695: "On this day, it is incumbent on every votary of Lakshmi to try the chance of the dice, and from their success in the Diwali, the prince, the chief, the merchant, and the artisan foretell the state of their coffers for the ensuing year."
N. Penzer, ed., *The Ocean of Story*, tr. C. Tawney, London, 1924–28, vol. 2, p. 232n., notes that in the Punjab, men would play only with their wives on this occasion so that any losses stayed within the family.

[19] For two examples of dice games with 16 cowries, see Bell, *Board and table games of many civilizations*, pp. 81–83.

[20] Maharana Sangram Singh's son Jagat Singh is shown winning at chaupar in a painting of c. 1740: see Finkel, "The Four-Arm Race", fig. 2, in the present volume.

[21] W. Knighton, *The private life of an Eastern king*, ed. S. Smith, London, 1921, pp. 28–31, with a further anecdote of a royal challenge to a game played for high stakes against a detested British aide-de-camp: "Jones," said the king, "will you play me a game of draughts ... for a hundred gold mohurs?" "I cannot afford to play for a hundred gold mohurs, your majesty; I am but a poor man." [The king then turns to the court tutor and invites him to play for the same stakes. Knowing the king's ways, the tutor agrees and duly loses the game.] "You owe me a hundred gold mohurs," [the king exclaims triumphantly. That evening at dinner, he asks the tutor]: "Well, master, have you brought the gold mohurs?" "I have, your majesty; they are below in my palanquin. Shall I bring them here?" "Nonsense, master. Keep them. Send them home again. Do you think I want your money? Jones thought I wanted his. Did you see how the pig ate? Wallah, but I hate him!"

[22] R.N. Prasad, *Raja Man Singh of Amber*, Calcutta, 1966, p. 145.

[23] Murray, *History of board games other than chess*, pp. 129–32; Bell, *Board and table games*, vol. 1, pp. 17–20.

[24] See e.g. C. Panduranga Bhatta, *Dice-play in Sanskrit literature*, Delhi, 1985, Ch. 4.

[25] J. Brough, *Poems from the Sanskrit*, Harmondsworth, 1968, no. 198, p. 121: a poem from the *Subhashitavali*, an anthology ascribed to Vallabhadeva (12th century).

[26] D.H. Ingalls, tr., *Sanskrit poetry from Vidyakara's 'Treasury'*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, no. 605, p. 159.

[27] Soar, "Shiva and Parvati at play", in the present volume.

[28] Brough, *Poems from the Sanskrit*, no. 141, p. 89; for further versions, see B.S. Miller, tr., *Bhartrihari: poems*, New York, 1967, no. 171, p. 125; G. Bailey's more literal treatment in *Love lyrics by Amaru and Bhartrihari*, New York, 2005, p. 167; and Soar, "Shiva and Parvati at play". Brough's misleading "chequer-board" image echoes Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat* (first ed., 1859), v. 49: "'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days / Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays: / Hither and thither moves, and mates and slays, / And one by one back in the Closet lays."

[29] H. Blochmann, tr., *'Ain-i Akbari of Abu'l-Fazl 'Allami*, repr. Delhi, 1965, p. 315.

[30] While mapping the architectural site of Vijayanagara, John Fritz reports that over 750 examples of incised graffiti game boards have been

In western India, Shiva and Parvati when playing dice together are invariably shown seated above the figure of a bull (Nandi) which is being teased by a group of *ganas*. They are variously accompanied by an entourage of Narada, Skanda, Bhringin, Ganesha, and other attendants of Shiva or the Goddess. The western Indian sculptures are generally innovative, lively, and earlier in date than the eastern Indian scenes, which are more formulaic and conventionalized. In both areas, however, it is clear from the use of the *vismaya* gesture of indignation or astonishment (a twisted, raised hand with splayed fingers) that the deities' game has resulted in an almighty quarrel. In the western tradition, Shiva is the winner and Parvati raises her hand in protest at his cheating, while in the east it is Shiva who makes the loser's gesture.[4]

The complexity of the game of dice theme in Shaiva art and myth can best be demonstrated by the badly damaged Uma-Maheshvara scene in the Kailasa Temple at Ellora (758–772 CE) right next to the shrine, on the left wall of the vestibule. The figure of Shiva is now missing, while the Goddess, unusually seated to his right, lacks arms and head. Below them is the usual scene of five *ganas* teasing the bull. Some years ago I discovered, high up on the ledge above this bull scene and placed transversely between the two gods, a nearly life-size three-dimensional rectangular gaming board (figure 2), measuring approximately 21 x 65 cm and 7 cm deep. Remarkably, this board has all its pieces intact, carved of the same rock as the rest of the temple. The pieces are symmetrically arranged in three groups of five pieces on each side, adding up to thirty pieces in all. They are of the round-topped conical type still used in India today for chaupar and other games, but their original colour and the configuration of the divisions on the board are lost along with the layer of plaster and paint that originally covered all the sculptures at Ellora. By careful measurement of the board and pieces, and assuming that each group of five pieces occupies a single square, the proportions reveal a board divided into two parallel rows of twelve houses with rounded ends towards the centre, where a longitudinal gap of about the width of one piece divides the board into two. This is undoubtedly a board for a backgammon-type game, which is still characterized by 30 pieces and 2 x 12 rows of squares.

2. Damaged stone relief of the dice game of Shiva and Parvati. Ellora, Kailasa Temple, main shrine vestibule, 758–772 CE. Photograph: Micaela Soar.

The arrangement of the pieces in three groups of five per side did not at first seem to correspond to any known backgammon position. However, a Sanskrit treatise written over 300 years after the caves were cut demonstrates that this configuration was in fact one of the starting positions for a backgammon game. The *Manasollasa* ("Delights of the Mind"), composed around 1100 by King Someshvara of the Chalukya dynasty which overthrew the Rashtrakutas of Ellora, gives a detailed description of a backgammon board whose measurements (though slightly larger) correspond closely with those of the Ellora board.[5] It even mentions the "elliptical" shape of the houses, the narrow space between the two rows, and the fact that the houses are differentiated by colour into four groups of six squares (the modern "inner" and "outer" rows for each player).

Further study of the known gaming boards depicted in ancient Indian temple sculptures reveals, moreover, that the

majority of these are also of the backgammon type, being identifiable as such by their characteristic 2 x 12-row configuration.[6] How then did this prevalence of backgammon come about, and what was the religious significance of the game when portrayed in temple sculpture?

One of the earliest examples of a possible backgammon board in India is on a Gupta-period terracotta relief of c. 400 CE from Punjab, perhaps from the vicinity of Chakwal, halfway between Islamabad and Lahore (figures 3 and 4).[7] Unusually, it is divided into eight rather than twelve squares on its long axis, but this may represent a transitional phase or a form of proto-backgammon. It is a hybrid board, with features from both West and East. There are three rows as in the Roman game, but rectangular-shaped houses as in nard and in other boards from India.

The main figures are broken off at the waist but it is clear from their costume and the iconography in the lower register that they are Shiva and Parvati playing a game of dice. The board is rectangular and divided by roughly incised lines into what appear to be three rows of eight squares each. Three long, four-sided dice are strewn on its surface, each with a different number of pips on its upturned side: they are marked with one, two, and an indistinct squiggle, respectively. Shiva appears to be holding a fourth die in his closed hand. Below, a bull is being teased by three Shiva *ganas*, while another *gana* supports the figure of Shiva by propping up his leg. A fifth *gana*, standing on the back of the bull, balances the board on his head and arms in a "caryatid" pose, holding it up for Shiva and Parvati to play. The *ganas* are chubby-cheeked and curly-haired in the style of Hellenistic sarcophagi, rather than the grotesque, dwarfish figures of Indian iconography.

Although this board does not have the standard 2 x 12 rows of squares characteristic of backgammon, it may well reflect an early stage in the development of the game. Central Asian boards from Paikend (c. 400 CE) and Pendzikend (c. 680–722)[8] have 3 x 8 rows and 3 x 12 rows respectively, while the boards in Roman territories were reduced gradually from three rows to two between 250 and 400 CE. Such boards retain traces of the older form. In this sculpture, influence from the Roman world is clear from the cherubic appearance of the figures, while at the same time the iconography of the bull and Shiva's animal-skin loincloth place it firmly within the Shaiva religious tradition. It is of course impossible to say in which direction the cultural influences leading to modifications in backgammon play were travelling, but it is likely that the original impetus came from India.

3 and 4. Damaged relief of the dice game of Shiva and Parvati, and detail showing game board. Punjab, Gupta period, c. 400 CE. Terracotta; 38 x 43 cm. Private collection. Photographs: Micaela Soar.

Luckily, a virtually identical composition can be seen on a small portable, double-sided shrine from Kashmir (figure 5), from the transitional period in the 5th to 6th century between the Gandhara tradition and independent Kashmir styles. It is undamaged and gives a complete version of the iconography, so enabling us to place the Shaiva game of dice in a broader context.

The scene in the lower register repeats that in the Gupta piece, and is a forerunner of the motif that persists in all later representations of Shiva and Parvati playing dice.

Stylistically the Kashmir shrine is very different from the Gupta example: the mischievous *ganas* teasing the bull have demonic faces, and one, about to strike the

5. Relief of Shiva and Parvati playing a dice game. Double-sided portable shrine. Kashmir region, 5th–6th century. Black schist; height: 23.5 cm. Present location unknown. Photograph courtesy of John Eskenazi Ltd.

bull, has the face of a satyr. Instead of curls, their hair is swept up and tied in a knot. The central caryatid figure of a *gana* holding up the board is retained, although it is transferred to the upper register and now faces outwards toward the observer in an iconic rather than narrative way.

It is the upper register that provides crucial information for the scene. Here Shiva is represented as the three-headed Maheshvara or Sadashiva, who persists as the central cult figure at Elephanta and in countless small caves scattered on the mountainside at Ellora. Scholars dispute the exact meaning of the iconography, but it must be generally agreed that the central face is calm, denoting *sattva* or maintenance of the universe, while the right face is an

6. Reverse of relief in figure 5. Upper register: Surya driving his chariot. Lower register: Jyotirlinga worshipped by priests and ascetics. Photograph courtesy of John Eskenazi Ltd.

angry form of Shiva, Aghora-Bhairava, the destroyer. The left face has a gentle feminine aspect, redolent of Uma, or of Shiva as creator. Next to Shiva are Skanda and perhaps Ganesha, while Bhringin observes the game from above Shiva's shoulder. On Parvati's side stands a figure holding a mace who may be Kala or Yama, God of Death and Justice.

The reverse of the shrine (figure 6) shows, in the upper register, Surya the sun god driving his chariot of seven horses, while in the lower register a Jyotirlinga ("Linga of Light") is being worshipped by ascetics or priests. Behind Surya is a young ascetic carrying a trident, possibly a form of Shiva when living in the forest after his separation from Sati, which caused him to drop his linga to earth. Although the figure of Surya is prominent, the purpose of the shrine is to celebrate the superiority of Shiva in all his functions and in his presence on earth in the form of the linga.

The board is too small to show any distinguishing marks, but three dice are visible on its surface with Parvati's hand covering one of them, about to make the next move. It is safe to assume, however, that the board represents a form of proto-backgammon, in view of all its other similarities to the Gupta piece. The presence of Surya on the reverse relates to astronomical or astrological considerations, which is also a consistent factor in the rationale of backgammon.

The earliest literary passages that may refer to backgammon touch on this point: Patanjali's commentary (2nd century BCE) on Panini's *Sutra* 5.2.9 and Bhartrihari's epigram on the fleetingness of Time (5th century or earlier).[9] Patanjali's mention of *aya* and *anaya*, movement in opposing directions, is reflected in a reference in the *Kashikhanda*, a section of the *Skanda Purana* (c. 700–1150), to the two paths of the sun: when it moves southward after the summer solstice, producing ever shorter days (known as *pitriyana*, or the path of the ancestors), until the turning point at the winter solstice when it starts moving north (*devayana*, the path of the gods).

> It is said [by Panini]: "that which can be given the property of *ayanaya*". In that word, it is not known what is meant by *aya* and what is meant by *anaya*. *Aya* means moving towards the right, clockwise, and *anaya* moving towards the left, counter-clockwise.[10] *Ayanaya* is that [activity] in which there is no joint entry of squares by opposing pieces that are going in a clockwise and a counter-clockwise direction. *Ayanayina* is a gaming piece that pertains to *ayanaya* [a particular kind of game that involves movement in opposing directions].[11]

Bhartrihari's deliberately ambiguous epigram, composed in a courtly Sanskrit style which was intended to be understood on different levels, may well refer to the sculptures of Shiva as Mahakala, the Destroyer, playing backgammon with Parvati:

> In any house (dwelling, or square on a board) where several (*aneka*) living beings (or game pieces) stand, there is later a single being (or game piece), and where there is a single, there are later many and at the end not a single (one). Thus Time (or Death) plays with a fraction of time (or matter), tossing Night and Day like two dice, with living beings as game pieces on the gaming-board of the earth.[12]

This is neither to say that backgammon was an exclusively Shaiva game, nor that it was the only game associated with the sculptures of Shiva and Parvati playing dice. The board depicted in a mural painting in Cave 2 at Ajanta (c. 480 CE), illustrating the *Vidhurapandita Jataka* (figure 7), is of the backgammon type, with two rows of twelve squares, and played with three long dice that are just visible in the Yaksha's hand. This shows that backgammon was played generally in courtly circles, regardless of the religious affiliation of the patrons, who may have been Buddhist in this case. By contrast, the board placed between the figures of Shiva and Parvati in the Rameshvara Cave

7. Wall-painting showing dice game, detail of the *Vidhurapandita Jataka* story. Ajanta, Cave 2, c. 483 CE. Photograph: Benoy K. Behl.

(Cave 21) at Ellora of 570–580 CE (figures 8 and 9) is divided by heavily incised lines into five rows of sixteen squares, which do not correspond to the layout for backgammon. Although the game has not been identified, it is clear from the two round-topped conical pieces on Shiva's side of the board and from Parvati's *vismaya* gesture of astonishment that Shiva is the winner.

It was only well after backgammon-type boards had become standardized to 2 x 12 rows in western India by about the 5th century CE, for example at Ajanta and at Sondni near Mandsaur around 530–540 (figure 10),[13] that the first boards began to appear in eastern Indian temples, from the 7th century onwards. Eastern Indian boards are strikingly uniform in design. They are placed vertically between the figures of Shiva and Parvati, occupying the centre of the composition and equal in height to the two gods. They are shown conventionally from above in bird's-eye view, as though to emphasize the importance of the division of the board into 2 x 12 rows of houses. Occasionally, the houses contain circular pieces (conical pieces seen from above), although there are never more than two per house. The earliest board discovered so far is from the Svarnajaleshvara Temple at Bhubaneshwar in Orissa of c. 610 CE.[14] It has decorative incisions in the central four fields, marking the division of the board into the four groups of six squares typical of backgammon. Another feature found only in some eastern Indian boards (e.g. Shukleshvara, Kundeshvara, Simhanatha)[15] is the in-curving outline of the two long sides (not seen here).

The figures in the Svarnajaleshvara relief are robust and unconventional. Shiva and Parvati are seated on either side of the board. Parvati holds a pair of long dice in one hand and what looks like Shiva's crescent moon in another. Other stakes she has won in the game are shown beside her. Shiva is making the *vismaya* gesture in protest, which denotes that he is the loser in the game. He holds an unidentified stick-like object across the board (a similar object appears in the Shukleshvara Temple relief), whose role in the game remains a mystery.

The frieze above the southern doorway of the Madhukeshvara Temple at Mukhalingam, Shrikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh, of the late 8th century is an even

8. Relief of Shiva and Parvati playing dice. Ellora, Rameshvara Cave (Cave 21), c. 570–580 CE. Photograph courtesy American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon.

9. Detail of figure 8, showing Parvati and the board. Photograph: Micaela Soar.

clearer example of Parvati winning the game (figure 11). A long procession of *ganas* leads the bull away on her side of the board, together with all the other stakes that Shiva has forfeited.[16]

The latest examples that I have found of Shiva and Parvati playing dice are two 10th- or 11th-century reliefs from the Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh, under the Kalachuri dynasty of Tripuri. One is now in the Rani Durgavati Museum, Jabalpur (figure 1). The other is a very similar piece from Maihar, also in Madhya Pradesh, which is now in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich (figure 12). These sculptures are highly stylized and iconic in form. In both cases, the board is foreshortened, so it is impossible to ascertain how many squares were intended. Rounded conical pieces occupy every space: in the Tripuri relief, there are apparently three pieces in the front row, the rest disappearing into the background and partly obscured by Shiva's hand. The Maihar relief has four pieces across the front row, with a space in the centre, perhaps denoting the equivalent space seen in the Kailasa Temple board at Ellora. In both reliefs, Parvati holds a pair of curiously curved long dice in her raised hand. The usual attendants surround the two gods. In both there is also a noteworthy persistence of the old motif of the caryatid figure holding up the board, as seen in the northwest Indian reliefs of the 5th to 6th century, discussed above (figures 3–6).

10. Relief of Shiva and Parvati playing dice. Part of a doorjamb, Sondni (near Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh), c. 530–540 CE. Photograph: Micaela Soar.

11. Lintel frieze showing Shiva and Parvati playing dice (to the left). Madhukeshvara Temple, Mukhalingam, Andhra Pradesh, late 8th century. Photograph courtesy American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon.

No backgammon boards appear in Indian temple sculpture after this period. The game, which had been associated with early forms of Shaivism and proto-Tantrism, was replaced by chaupar and other games. These continued to be played in temples at appropriate times of the year, as can be deduced from the many roughly incised boards discovered on temple floors in many parts of India. The aristocratic game of backgammon, full of didactic symbolism that refers back to royal sacrifices and the process of brahminization (as I shall discuss below), did not survive among Hindus in the age of the rising *bhakti* devotional cults.

The case of Ellora

It is worth exploring further the religious and cultural significance of backgammon at the zenith of its importance in western India, as exemplified by the site of Ellora and its associated myths, which found expression in the sculptures depicting the divine dice game, such as the fine relief in Cave 14 (figure 13).

Dicing had already played a significant role in religious ritual since the Vedic period, where it was connected with seasonal sacrifices and killing of the bull, particularly at Ekashtaka, the eighth day after the full moon at the winter solstice. The Sutras or instruction texts for ritual sacrifices (6th century BCE – 2nd century CE) never describe a cow-killing sacrifice without a game of dice. Dicing with *vibhitaka* nuts was moreover particularly associated with Rudra, one of Shiva's Vedic precursors. In the *Mahabharata*, the outcome of a dice game starts an epoch-changing war, introducing a new world order at the start of the Dvapara Yuga.

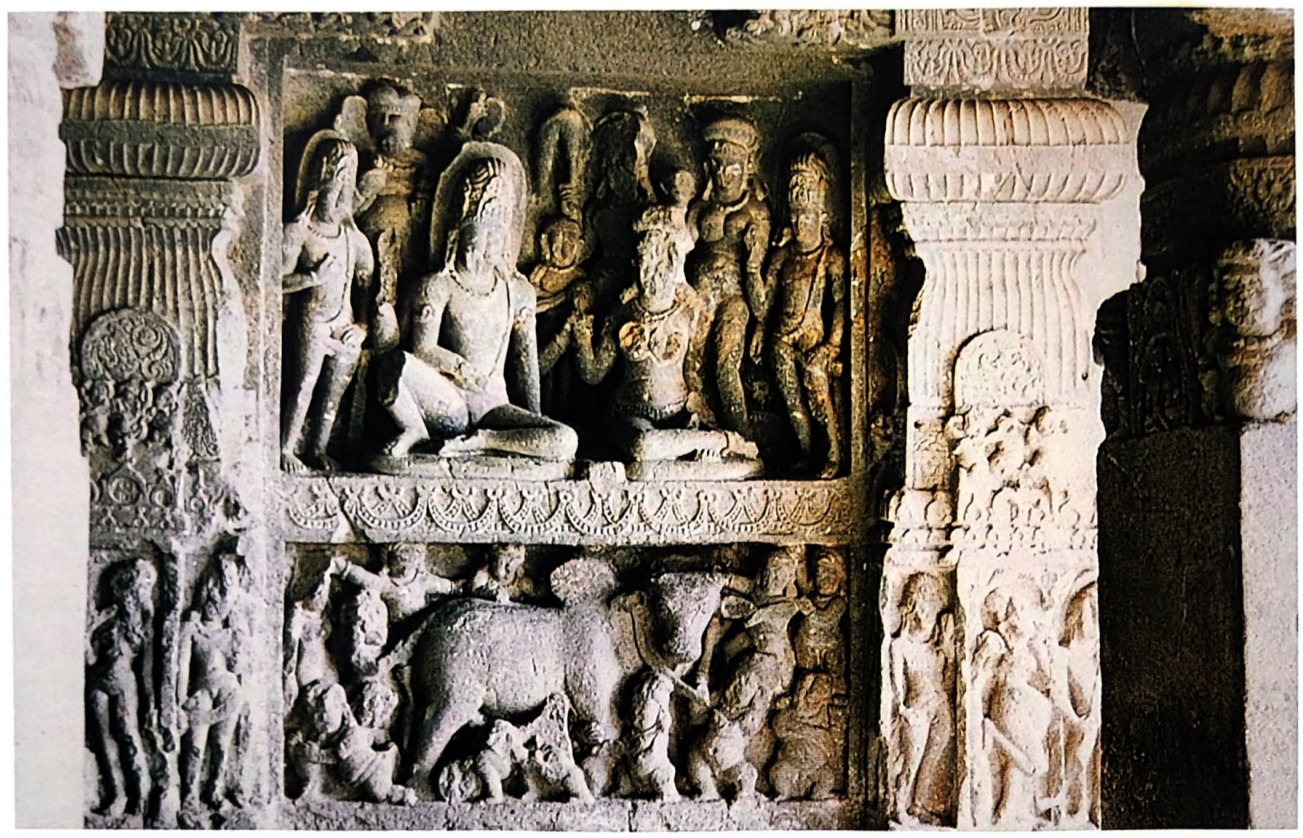
There was therefore a long prior gaming tradition in both royal and religious circles, which underlies the *Kashikhanda* episode of the *Skanda Purana*:

> O God of Gods, your game is the whole Universe.
> The houses on the gaming board, O Lord, are the twelve months,
> The dark and light pieces are the days of the moon,
> Of which there are twice fifteen in a month; the two dice are the two paths of the sun (*ayane*).

The two outcomes, victory and defeat,
are called Creation and Dissolution.
When Devi wins there is Emanation,
when Dhurjati (Shiva) wins there is Re-
absorption.
While you two are engaged in playing,
continued existence [of the Universe] is
upheld.
Thus the game itself is the entire Universe
of the two Gods.
Devi is unable to defeat her husband,
Isha cannot defeat Shakti.
I have one more thing to say to the
Mother:
Although the God is omniscient, he
understands nothing at all
Since he remains very far removed from
both honour and disgrace.
His very being is play...[17]

In this passage Shiva and Parvati are

12. Relief of Shiva and Parvati playing dice. Maihar, Madhya Pradesh, 10th–11th century. Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich. Photograph courtesy of the Museum.



13. Relief of Shiva and Parvati playing dice. Ellora, Cave 14, c. 610–620 CE. Photograph: Micaela Soar.

described playing the Cosmic Game which maintains the Universe (and which can destroy and re-create it, depending on the result), at the same time as Daksha was performing a sacrifice with the same end in view, to which Shiva had not been invited. At Ellora, a complex narrative developed in connection with this Great Game of the gods, combining many different mythical strands. It starts with the dice game and ends with the establishment of a local cult and an elaborate body of myth and religious ritual.

Ellora is famous to this day as the site of one of the Twelve Jyotirlingas of Shiva. The Ghrishneshvara Jyotirlinga at Shivalaya, the last and most efficacious in the traditional list of twelve, is now situated in the Ghrishneshvara Temple, rebuilt by Ahalyabai Holkar in the 18th century in the vicinity of the village, some distance from the caves. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims congregate there at Mahashivaratri in January/February and an almost equally large number attend the Dandipurnima *yatra* of the Goddess Girija, which takes place annually just before, at the top of the mountain above the caves where there is the Girija Temple at Mhaishmal.

The story of how this Jyotirlinga came to be there is told in a recently discovered manuscript of the *Shivalaya Mahatmya,*[18] a text which claims to be part of the *Sahyadrikhanda* of the *Skanda Purana* but is not found in any printed version of the *Purana*.[19] The *Shivalaya Mahatmya* gives a distinctly local version of the story by relating the origin of the Jyotirlinga to the history of Elapura. Ellora was a centre of Goddess (Devi) worship, to which Shiva was brought in the form of a Jyotirlinga. Interwoven within that theme, the story reveals how the area was brahminized by a local king who modelled himself on the mythical King Ila, founder of the lunar dynasty, and renamed the town Elapura, after his own name.

The narrative in the *Shivalaya Mahatmya* can be summarized as follows:
Introduction: Shiva and Parvati are playing a game of dice called *Mahadyuta* (the Great Game) on Mount Kailasa. They are also called Purusha and Prakriti (Consciousness and Matter), the masculine and feminine principles. They are so equally balanced that they cannot defeat each other: first one, and then the other, wins. Finally Shiva wins by cheating. He makes fun of Parvati and

humiliates her by making her fetch the defiling accoutrements he wears as an ascetic. In fury, she refuses to remain a slave and leaves.

1. Devi comes to earth at this particular place, Ellora, near the Vindhya mountains north of the river Gautami. She founds her own sacred area around an existing lake, which she imagines is Brahmasaras, the divine lake of Brahma. She models the area on the sacred geography around Kailasa, with its Manasarovara lake, and remembering Shiva, she creates eight *tirthas* around the lake and worships a different linga in each of the directions. She then flies north to Umavana (Mhaishmal), where she performs great austerities to alleviate the pain of her separation from Shiva and pronounces a "femininity" curse, by which all male creatures that enter her grove will be transformed into females. King Ila, the scion of the lunar dynasty of kings, arrives at the Goddess's grove and is transformed into a woman, Ilaa.

2. Meanwhile Shiva withdraws into a trance on Kailasa, alone, missing his consort, and pronounces a counter-curse: all females become males. The gods come to Shiva and plead for him to be reunited with his Shakti because they cannot perform their duties while the two are separated. The Goddess becomes dangerous to them because they cannot keep their own forms. Usually, when the gods are threatened, a fight ensues with the *asuras* but here the threat is Devi, who invincibly embodies all their powers combined. They send Ganga to intercede on their behalf and convince Parvati to reunite with Shiva. The idea of the complementarity of the forces of Shiva and Shakti first comes in at this stage.

3. Devi is persuaded by Ganga to reunite with Shiva and the river Elaa springs from her tears of joy. Meanwhile, the two Goddesses convince Ilaa to take up her male form again – King Ila rises from the water at the Goddess's feet. The Ghrishneshvara Jyotirlinga appears and is worshipped by the king, as are other *tirthas* along the river Elaa.

4. The king founds Dhara Tirtha at the spot where the river Elaa falls from the escarpment above the caves, and makes land grants to temples and to brahmins. He renames the city Elapura, where Shiva and Parvati become reunited at a wedding ceremony performed by Brahma. The rewards from bathing and visiting sacred *tirthas* are connected with performing worship at specific days and times according to the luni-solar calendar. The *Mahatmya* thus records the establishment of particular religious festivals by a king.

It is possible that there is a faint reminiscence in the *Mahatmya*'s narrative of events in the time of the first Rashtrakuta emperor Dantidurga (c. 741–758), as revealed in the inscription and iconography of the Dashavatara Cave (Cave 15) at Ellora. In his Dashavatara Cave inscription the king records arriving with his army and bathing there with *apsaras*es (heavenly maidens). The three-storeyed temple itself was transformed at about the same time from a Buddhist establishment to a Hindu one, displaying images of an unprecedented scale from Shaiva and Vaishnava mythology on either side of the columned hall. The *Shivalaya Mahatmya* was composed at a time when the Rashtrakutas were gaining supremacy over their rivals in the Deccan and portrayed themselves as "world conquerors", bridging the gap between north and south.

It is evident that the area around Ellora had been a centre of Devi worship for centuries, as can be seen from some proto-Tantric iconography in the Buddhist, Hindu, and later Jain caves.[20] The theme of a game of dice between Shiva and Parvati is a catalyst that causes destruction and separation, which is ultimately redeemed by the creation of the Jyotirlinga. It is presented at Ellora under the imperial banner of a Rashtrakuta king. The Game of Dice legend as told in the *Shivalaya Mahatmya* can well be regarded as a strategy to incorporate this Devi-centred area into the Shaiva and then the Hari-Hara brahmin fold.[21]

POSTSCRIPT

A Note on Backgammon in Mughal India

ANDREW TOPSFIELD

The disappearance of backgammon from the sculptural record after the 11th century indeed suggests that it was falling out of favour as a game in India by this time, probably in part because it was overtaken by the rise of chaupar to its high level of general popularity from the 15th century onward. Backgammon nevertheless enjoyed a subsequent revival in north India and the Deccan when reintroduced in the form of Persian nard, as a result of Iranian cultural influence in the Sultanate and Mughal periods. By the late Sultanate period, around 1500, two depictions of nard players appear for example in the British Library *Miftah al-Fuzala* from the central Indian court of Mandu.[22] In the first of these (figure 14), two noblemen play ziad, one of the games in nard, in a stylized landscape.

In early Mughal painting, the subject of backgammon appears, as one would expect, in illustrations of the famous *Shahnama* story,[23] drawn by Firdausi (c. 1000) from much earlier sources, of the challenge made by an Indian embassy bearing a chessboard, whose purpose was resourcefully divined by the Persian minister Buzurjmihr and triumphantly countered by his supposed spontaneous invention of nard. Backgammon play also appears occasionally in scenes illustrating court life (figure 15).[24] In an Akbari illustration of c. 1590 to the ethical work *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*,[25] the distracting worldly pleasures which may lead the idle man astray are depicted as scattered wine vessels and a shattered, double-sided game board for backgammon and chess, strewn along with its pieces on the ground. A magnificent 17th-century Mughal example of a hinged, reversible board of this type, in painted and gilded wood, is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.[26]

That backgammon was however still played more widely than in Muslim court circles alone, is suggested by a Nepalese *Mahabharata* illustration of c. 1600 in the Cambridge University Library (figure 16).[27] Most unusually, this depicts Yudhishthira's fateful dice play as a game of backgammon. In later Rajput or folk painting versions of the same scene the game is normally shown as chaupar, as also was the case with the dice game played between Shiva and Parvati,[28] formerly shown in sculpture as backgammon. Krishna and Radha also often play chaupar as part of their *lila* (divine play) in Pahari and Rajasthani pictures; but at least one Basohli painting of c. 1760 shows them

14. Noblemen playing a form of nard (backgammon), watched by a youth. Illustration to a manuscript of the *Miftah al-Fuzala*. Mandu, central India, c. 1490–1500: The British Library, London. Photograph courtesy of the British Library.

playing backgammon instead,[29] a reflection of its continuing popularity in both imperial and some provincial court circles.

In Colonel Gentil's Album of Indian life and customs, illustrated by local artists at Faizabad in 1774,[30] backgammon (tric-trac) is indeed depicted as one of the more popular games of Hindustan, although from that time onward its prevalence may have been due as much to European as to Persian influence. By the early 19th century, the game is described, in a south Indian Muslim context, as being "played by men who have been in Persia, or who have learnt it from natives of that country or from Englishmen".[31]

15. A prince watches his companions play backgammon. Mughal school, north India, early 17th century. Gouache on paper; painting 15.5 x 9.5 cm. Terence McInerney, New York. Photograph courtesy Terence McInerney.

NOTES

[1] For a brief account, see I.L. Finkel, "The World Conqueror emerges: Backgammon in Persia", in C. Mackenzie and I.L. Finkel, eds., *Asian games: The art of contest*, New York, 2004, pp. 89–95.

[2] For Elephanta see C. Berkson et al., *Elephanta: The Cave of Shiva*, Princeton, 1983, pl. 27. For Jogeshwari see W. Spink, *Ajanta to Ellora*, Ann Arbor and Bombay, 1967, p. 63, pl. 5, and M. Soar, "Board Games and backgammon in ancient Indian sculpture", in I.L. Finkel, ed., *Board games in perspective*, London: British Museum, forthcoming.

[3] Krishna Deva, "Siva and Parvati playing dice", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, n.s. 16–17, pp. 44–49.

[4] Previously these sculptures were known as Uma-Maheshvara, Umasahitamurti or Alingana-Chandrashekharamurti, and the fact that they were playing dice was rarely noted. J.N. Banerjea, *The development of Hindu iconography*, Calcutta, 1956, pp. 464–69, classified such images according to the Agamas and other late texts as *saumya* or peaceful aspects of Shiva,"not associated with any particular myth". But it is more likely that these images convey a definite narrative that is both *ugra* (terrific) and *saumya* and stems from a tradition based on ritual sacrifice, changing forms of worship, and increasing brahminization.

[5] A. Bock-Raming, "Untersuchungen zum indischen Würfelspiel in nachvedischer Zeit, I: Das Backgammon nach der Darstellung des *Manasollasa*", *Schach-Forschungen*, 9, Seevetal, 1995.

[6] Soar, "Board Games and backgammon in ancient Indian sculpture".

[7] Ibid.

[8] See article by Semenov in Finkel, ed., *Board games in perspective*.

[9] For Patanjali see F. Kielhorn, ed., *Mahabhasya of Patanjali*, Bombay, 1880; for Bhartrihari see D.D. Kosambi, ed., *The Epigrams attributed to Bhartrihari*, Bombay, 1948.

[10] The translation "clockwise" is of course anachronistic but serves here for *pradakshina,* or circumambulating a sacred object or shrine while keeping it to one's right.

[11] Kielhorn, *Mahabhasya*, vol. II, p. 373, lines 3–6: translation by the present author.

[12] Translation by the present author.

16. Shakuni and Yudhishthira playing backgammon, a scene from the *Mahabharata*. Detail from a *Kalapustaka* manuscript page, Nepal, c. 1600. Gouache on paper. Cambridge University Library, MS Add. 864. Photograph courtesy P. Pal.

[13] For Sondni see R. Syed, "Siva and Parvati beim Spiel: Eine Untersuchung literarischer und bildischer Quellen", *Berliner Indologische Studien*, 11–12, Reinbeck, 1998, p. 406, fig. 1.

[14] T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu temple art of Orissa*, Leiden, 1985–87, vol. 1, pp. 43–50; vol. 3, p. 1349, fig. 3645.

[15] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1349, figs. 3589, 3646, 3647.

[16] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1349, fig. 3648; K. Deva, "Siva and Parvati playing dice", p. 48, pl. XVII, fig. 9.

[17] *Skanda Purana*, section 4 (*Kashikhanda*, ch. 88, vv. 5–12): translation (here slightly adapted) from D. Handelman and D. Shulman, *God inside out: Siva's game of dice*, New York: OUP, 1997, p. 66.

[18] The unique copy of this manuscript is in the Central Library, Mumbai (previously Asiatic Society of Bombay). The present author has identified the content as based on early Sanskrit traditions relating to the famous cave temples and pilgrimage sites of Ellora: for a full study and translation see M. Soar, *Myth and history at Ellora* (provisional title), University of London Ph.D. thesis, forthcoming.

[19] There is, of course, another story of the origin of the Ghrishneshvara Jyotirlinga in the *Shiva Purana* (it is called Ghushmeshvaralinga in that text), which differs completely from that of the *Shivalaya Mahatmya* and does not mention a game of dice.

[20] For Buddhist iconography see G.H. Malandra, *Unfolding a Mandala: The Buddhist cave temples at Ellora*, New York, 1993; for Jain iconography see J. Pereira, *Monolithic Jinas: the iconography of the Jain temples of Ellora*, Delhi, 1997; for Hindu iconography, see Soar, *Myth and history at Ellora* (provisional title, forthcoming).

[21] In Orissa in eastern India, the dice game sculptures conform to the very different myth in the *Kedarakhanda* of the *Skanda Purana*. It is still a Shakta Goddess-centred area but it does not appear to have been brahminized in the same way, as there is no mention of any kings. Here it is Devi who wins and Shiva that comes down to earth in the form of an ascetic. They become reunited after the Goddess takes on the form of a forest woman and seduces him, but they are married at the end according to the brahmin rites.

[22] British Library Or. 3299, ff. 144a, 184a: N.M. Titley, *Miniatures from Persian manuscripts*, London, 1978, no. 366 (70), (96).

[23] E.g. ibid., p. 298, s.v. nard.

[24] McKenzie and Finkel, *Asian games*, col. pl. p. 92.

[25] B.N. Goswamy and E. Fischer, *Wonders of a Golden Age*, Zurich, 1987, no. 57.

[26] McKenzie and Finkel, *Asian games*, col. pls. pp. 88, 149.

[27] P. Pal, 'A *Kalapustaka* from Nepal', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Benares*, 1, 1967, p. 25, fig. 47.

[28] E.g. the often published Basohli painting in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (McKenzie and Finkel, *Asian games*, col. pl. p. 54).

[29] Sotheby's sale cat., October 11, 1982, lot 95 and illus.

[30] Victoria and Albert Museum, London: see Topsfield, "Dice, Chaupar, Chess", fig. 10, in the present volume.

[31] G.A. Herklots, tr., *Islam in India, or the Qanun-i Islam of Ja'far Sharif*, ed. W. Crooke, repr. London, 1975, pp. 332–33.

THE FOUR-ARM RACE

THE INDIAN GAME OF PACHISI OR CHAUPAR ← Not Gyan Chaupar

I.L. FINKEL

The fine Mewar painting reproduced here (figure 2) shows Maharana Jagat Singh II (1734–51) seated in the comfort of his palace playing a board game with his courtiers.[1] The cross-shaped playing grid is easily made out in the form of a four-armed design with playing squares or "houses" embroidered on a square of cloth. The Maharana smokes a hookah, and has the largest pile of stakes at his disposal: they are evidently playing for wagers. Unlike many images in such paintings, a real game seems to be depicted, without artistic licence. And what is the game that so absorbs the players? It is India's most venerable and enduring race game, a classic of that genre, played out on the four arms of a 96-square board, usually, as here, by four players.

There are many names for the game, some purely local. That most frequently encountered in board game studies is pachisi, although this name is not met with so often in India as chaupar. Historical names are usually meaningful. Pachisi, for example, Hindi for "twenty-five", derives from the highest score (or usually the highest), that can be generated by one throw of the dice. Chaupar, on the other hand, reflects the "four arms" that characterize the traditional board. or four legs

The origins of this game remain obscure, and, given its importance, pachisi has attracted relatively little attention from board game historians.[2] Surprisingly modern-looking dice and pieces along with one or two gaming boards have been recovered from archaeological sites of the Indus Civilization (3rd millennium BCE onwards), although there is so far no evidence of a board of cruciform shape. From a theoretical standpoint, the fact that the overwhelming majority of the world's board games, including race games, are for two players might suggest that four-player pachisi, anchored as it is in the cardinal points, might owe its ultimate origin to the doubling of a simpler game of very considerable antiquity, for two players.

While considering early history, it is worth pointing out too that pachisi is never, as has often been claimed, depicted in early sculptures of Shiva and Parvati playing a game. Those of the 6th or 7th century at Ellora, for example, are now seen as backgammon-type games.[3] Indeed, the consistent depiction of pachisi in corresponding later paintings probably reflects the consequences of the eclipse of the earlier game. Traditionally, too, in India pachisi has usually been identified as the gambling game that plays so important a role in the *Mahabharata*. The point is often brought out in illustrations which are however well over a thousand years later in date than the epic. The descriptions of equipment and play that are given in the epic moreover make it unlikely that the game is pachisi. ?

← common misinformation

1. A miscellany of pachisi boards from all over India. Private collection. Photograph: J. Kosek.

Although in time pachisi came to be recognized as the "national game of India",[4] the game was for long associated with courtly circles and the aristocracy. The most grandiose surviving manifestation of this tradition, the giant outdoor board laid out at Fatehpur Sikri supposedly for the enjoyment of the Mughal emperor Akbar (1542–1605), is a monument in stone to the fact (figure 3), and if the Akbari legend is true it would remain the earliest unequivocal evidence for the existence of the game in India.[5] (Tradition has it that beautiful girls formed the pieces, while their ruler tossed outsize examples of long dice, or *pasa*s, seated on the low stone table that survives in the middle of the board). We owe to Akbar's historian Abu'l Fazl a good description of how the game, which he calls chaupar, worked when it was played for wagers in the court at that time.

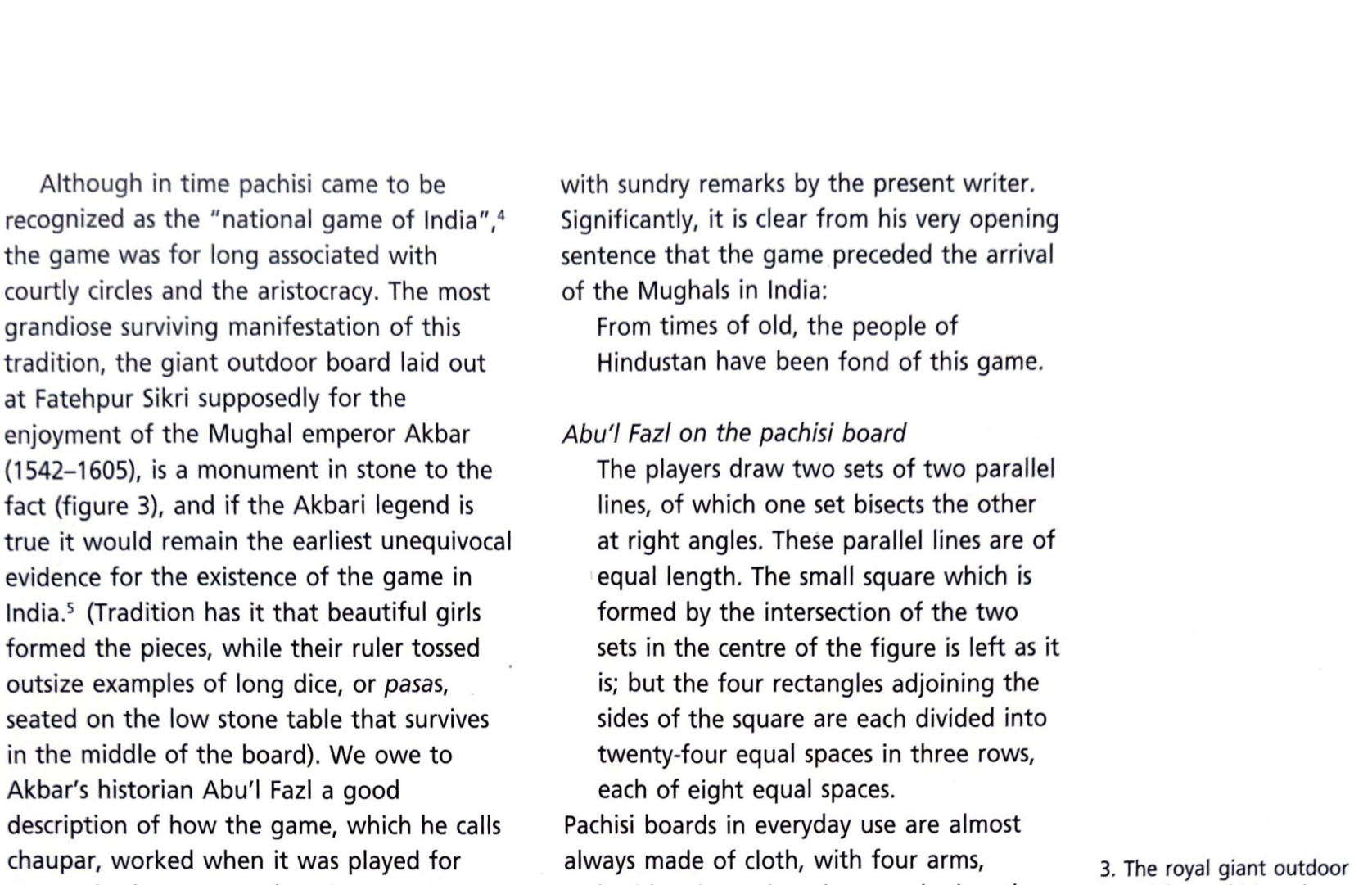
Some highlights of Abu'l Fazl's account now follow. They are quoted here from Blochmann's translation[6] and interspersed with sundry remarks by the present writer. Significantly, it is clear from his very opening sentence that the game preceded the arrival of the Mughals in India:

> From times of old, the people of Hindustan have been fond of this game.

Abu'l Fazl on the pachisi board

> The players draw two sets of two parallel lines, of which one set bisects the other at right angles. These parallel lines are of equal length. The small square which is formed by the intersection of the two sets in the centre of the figure is left as it is; but the four rectangles adjoining the sides of the square are each divided into twenty-four equal spaces in three rows, each of eight equal spaces.

Pachisi boards in everyday use are almost always made of cloth, with four arms, embroidered or otherwise, attached to the sides of a central rectangle. Most will have been made by local tailors, and a colourful range of styles, materials, and designs awaits



3. The royal giant outdoor board for pachisi or chaupar at Fatehpur Sikri. Late 16th or possibly early 18th century. Photograph: Robert Skelton.

documentation by the interested historian. Decoration and design in fact have certainly been related to state, district, or tribe, with a hundred varieties in between. Illustrated here are an unusual, luxurious 18th-century board (figure 4), of gold wire sewn onto a square of red velvet with arms orientated to the corners (today in West Asia boards for the game follow the same format and must derive from such old examples); a traditional format 18th-century board (figure 5) of gold wire on faded purple velvet, with playing pieces of glass, in imitation of rock crystal, which are hard to distinguish from one another; and a group of later Indian boards of different kinds (figure 1).

Varieties also apply in technical details. On any given pachisi board a certain number of squares – usually three per arm, as with the Fatehpur Sikri board – will be cross-cut; these are safe squares, which can have additional significance in the play of the game. There is surprising fluidity in the distribution of such squares in that at least twenty-three distinct layouts have been documented, of which a handful are not even symmetrical. Pachisi cloths are sometimes found with a pocket at the back of one arm to hold the equipment, enabling the whole to be neatly bundled up for storage or carrying. A favoured northwestern tradition is boards made of threaded glass beads, while other boards may be made of wood or silver, formed out of two interlocking pieces; the cruciform playing grid can also be found on durries, or block-printed, sometimes with other game boards, on large-scale "picnic blankets" (*dastarkhwan*). Establishing a history and typology of pachisi boards will be difficult given the size of the task itself, and the very considerable rarity of pre-20th-century samples, although many a fine specimen must be preserved, among other old worked cloths, within long-unopened trunks. Gaming boards, like other textiles in India, are always vulnerable to the perils of climate, insects, and recycling, since families who have given up the game, or wish to deter excessive use, have made something new out of their boards, just as they have made jewellery from redundant long dice or pieces of ivory.

Abu'l Fazl on pachisi pieces

> It is played with sixteen pieces of the same shape, but every four of them must have the same colour. The pieces all move in the same direction.

Playing pieces are characteristically dome-shaped, likened by writers variously to a minaret or a woman's breast, depending on their perspective, and are to be found in an exuberant abundance of designs and materials. Figure 6 shows a representative sampling of design extremes in *gotis*, i.e. pachisi men, which can be found in painted wood, bone, ivory, glass, beads, semi-precious stones, precious stones, crystal, brass, silver, and gold (and no doubt other media). Truly exotic pieces can be painted like a miniature, or represent in the round small carved birds or female musicians. Colours are traditionally red, black, green, and yellow, although imported blue glass *gotis* certainly found favour at the beginning of the 20th century, and other colours do occur from time to time. Pachisi pieces often attain considerable longevity, despite the fact that capturing and displacing an opponent's piece – a crucial element of the game – is usually expressed by the verb "to kill", and the death blow administered by slamming one's piece down hard on the victim; venerable pieces often bear scars that speak of serious battles. Silver or brass pachisi pieces are often in openwork with internal bells, with only slight differences in decoration. This makes them hard to distinguish, and such sets are likely to be wedding gifts which were never designed for regular use. Pachisi pieces seem – although the point awaits scientific testing – to get smaller as one moves from north India to the south. Outsize painted wooden pieces, a good six inches high, have been used for boards inlaid in the hallways or courtyards of ample houses.

4. Pachisi or chaupar board.
North India, 18th century. Velvet
and gold wire; 41.9 x 43.9 cm.
Private collection.

Abu'l Fazl on pachisi dice

> The players use three dice. Four of the six sides of each dice are greater than the remaining two, the four long sides being marked with one, two, five, and six dots respectively...

Dice have traditionally been long or stick dice of this type, sometimes called *pasas*, for which, as remarked, remote ancestors appear in Indus Civilization times. Long dice are usually of bone or ivory, with numerals expressed by a dot-and-ring device. A challenging array of possible number systems exists: the general rule with dice, that opposite faces add up to seven, tends to prevail in India also. The most common types are (as in Akbar's time) 1:6; 2:5, often in threes, or 1:6; 3:4, often in pairs. As is clear from the assembled specimens in figure 7, long dice occur in wood, glass, various metals, as well as with bead covers to match pieces in that style.

Throws for long dice have the peculiarity in India that they have their own names, often in more than one language at the same time, as has been shown by Richard Carnac Temple.[7]

For some reason cubic dice, undoubtedly the most popular dice in a global sense, were never much favoured in India after the Indus Civilization period, although pachisi sets have turned up from Tamil Nadu, for example, with such six-sided dice with black inlay in the scoring holes. For families for whom expensive, hand-made dice were out of reach, the usual alternative was the cowry shell. Cowries have always done sterling work in India, and as dice they serve admirably, although imitations in glass, brass, silver, or gold have also been produced for more luxurious play. A group, cast from the hand, provides the score by the number of "teeth" shown uppermost. Here again there is a multitude of systems; specimen examples for six and seven cowries may be conveniently summarized by means of the diagram below.

Cowries have the additional feature that a seasoned player can throw a desired combination more or less at whim. If this fact is widely acknowledged, it has not generally led to devices such as the bowl into which Burmese pachisi players have to throw their dice, but cowries are traditionally thrown up into the air for this reason. Some writers have suggested that it is the use of long dice as opposed to cowries that is most significant in distinguishing "pachisi" from "chaupar", but this has proved to be a great oversimplification.

○●●●●●	=	10	○●●●●●	=	2
○○●●●●	=	2	○○●●●●	=	3
○○○●●●	=	3	○○○●●●	=	4
○○○○●●	=	4	○○○○●●	=	6
○○○○○●	=	5	○○○○○●	=	10
○○○○○○	=	6+	○○○○○○	=	12
●●●●●●	=	25+	●●●●●●	=	25

○●●●●●●	=	1	○●●●●●●	=	2
○○●●●●●	=	2	○○●●●●●	=	3
○○○●●●●	=	3	○○○●●●●	=	4
○○○○●●●	=	4	○○○○●●●	=	7
○○○○○●●	=	5	○○○○○●●	=	10
○○○○○○●	=	6	○○○○○○●	=	14
○○○○○○○	=	12	○○○○○○○	=	25
●●●●●●●	=	25	●●●●●●●	=	30

Note: ○ = cowrie with slit or teeth uppermost; ● = cowrie with slit or teeth downward.

Abu'l Fazl on pachisi play

> The game is generally played by four players, of whom two play against the other two. Each player has four pieces, of which he puts two in the sixth and seventh spaces of the idle row of the parallelogram before him, and the other two in the seventh and eighth spaces of the right row. The left row remains empty. Each player moves his pieces, according to the throw, in the outer row, always keeping to the right, till he arrives at the outer left row of the parallelogram, from which he started, and from there he moves to the middle row. When arrived at the latter place, he is *pukhta* (ripe), and from here, he must throw for each of his pieces the exact number which will carry them to the empty square in the centre of the figure. He is now *rasida*, or arrived...

In fact, this is only one of a large number of possible starting positions; some games start with no pieces on the board at all. As with all other "rules" pertaining to this game, even the anti-clockwise direction prescribed here is not a universal practice.

> As long as a player keeps two of his pieces together, the adversary cannot throw them out. If a player throws a double six, he can move two pieces over twelve spaces, provided the two pieces stand together on one field; but he is allowed to move them only six fields onwards should he prefer doing so. A similar rule holds for double fives etc. A throw consisting of a six, a five, and a one is called *kham* (raw); and, in this case, two pieces, provided they are together on the same field, may each be moved six fields forwards, and every single piece twelve fields. If a player throws three sixes, and three of his four pieces happen to stand on one field, he may move each of them over twelve fields. A similar rule holds, if a player holds three twos, or three ones. There are many other rules for particular cases. If a player has brought his four pieces into the central square, he throws, when his turn comes, for his companion, to get him out too.

Akbar also introduced certain innovations, including those concerning betting which were possibly adhered to two centuries later by Maharana Jagat Singh of Mewar (see figure 2):

> If the throws of two players are the same as the throw of the preceding players, His Majesty counts them as *qayim*, or standing. Formerly he did not allow such equal throws. If the four pieces of an opponent are *pukhta*, and yet he lose his bet, the other players are entitled to double the amount of the bet. Should any of the players leave the game for some reason he may appoint anyone to play for him, but he will have to be responsible for the betting of his substitute. Of all winnings the substitute is entitled to two per cent; if a player loses a bet, his substitute has to pay one per cent. If a player drops one of his pieces, or any of the players be late or inattentive, he is fined one rupee. But a fine of a *muhur* is exacted if any one prompts the other, or moves his pieces over too many fields, or tries to get two throws.

Abu'l Fazl adds, in conclusion, a more revealing and human observation:

> Formerly many grandees took part in this game; there were often as many as two hundred players, and no one was allowed to go home before he had finished sixteen games, which in some cases lasted three months. If any of them lost his patience and got restless, he had to drink a cup of wine.

The great Akbar was thus a serious devotee of this type of dice game. He also enjoyed a version that he supposedly invented with sixteen arms called *chandal mandal*,[8] that could be played in at least twelve different ways, with super-long-dice to match!

* * *

Similar experiments were made by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar of Mysore (1794–1868), whose pachisi developments included six,

6. An assortment of single pieces for pachisi, in many designs and materials. Private collection.

7. Traditional Indian dice in a variety of types, not all used for pachisi. Private collection.

eight, ten, and twelve-arm versions, as well as a hybrid pachisi / Snakes and Ladders game played on a four-armed board, where inscribed squares send the players backwards and forwards in a cosmic cycle of birth and rebirth (see page 1). Each arm is seen to represent one of the four castes or *varnas*, brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra, and examples for play were inlaid into wood, block-printed onto silk, and even painted on glass.

For most players, however, pachisi has never been such a grand or time-consuming affair, although dedicated players are famously deaf to interruption or responsibility, and more than boisterous in play, as recorded by the Reverend Lall Behari Dey, discussing "Festivals, Games and Amusements; Ancient and Modern" for the fourth article of the section entitled "Bengali Games and Amusements" in the *Calcutta Review* of 1851:

> The *Pasha*-board is, on the contrary, a scene of noisy vociferation. The combatants breathe hatred and vengeance against each other; the throws of the dice are accompanied with tremendous noise; and the sounds of "*Kache-Baro*" and "*Baro-Panch*" are heard from a considerable distance. It is altogether a lively scene...

On the whole pachisi does not involve gambling, but when it does it is exclusively played by men. In many contexts it is only women who play, in others newly married couples play the game together as a means towards establishing a first familiarity.

By the 18th or 19th century, if not earlier, pachisi had passed from being an "upper-class" game to being widely played, as is reflected in many accounts and references. As a consequence, scratched graffiti or even chalked boards for this as for other traditional games are to be encountered in many public places. Recent investigations suggest, however, that its popularity has waned substantially, with less take-up among young people eager to master the rules. A possible reputation for complexity in comparison with lesser games might not be entirely unmerited, since the possibilities of multiple and grace dice throws and flexibility in how they should be exploited lifts pachisi far above the class of a simple race game. Indeed, in its most sophisticated versions it presents that blend of chance and tactical skill that characterizes many of the world's most effective board games.[9]

While the Indian game finds counterparts in Burma (pasit), Nepal (tharki or tripasa), Sri Lanka (pachis) and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, as well as in West Asia – for example, Syria (b'rsis) or Lebanon (barjis) – the game of pachisi has additionally generated a whole family of direct descendants in the West. As also happened with Snakes and Ladders, interested parties must have imported examples of the game with their playing rules, and rapidly subjected them to the joint processes of simplification and commercialization. Since sometime after 1850, manufactured versions in both England (Patchesi / Ludo) and America (Parcheesi) have become so successful that equipment for the game continues to be found in almost every household on both sides of the Atlantic.[10] As a consequence of this, a fascinating array of direct pachisi descendants is today played the world over. In the case of pachisi, this triumph involved simplification of the original to the point that it has gained enduring success as a family, and especially a children's, game.

The historian will also note that – perhaps in the 1950s – this most elementary English Ludo found its way back to India, where it has gained a new lease of life among children and adults alike. Few Ludo players who crouch excitedly over a modern board of printed cardboard, moving plastic pieces and dice, have any inkling of the distinguished and venerable history of the original game in India, or the beauty and elegance of the equipment with which it has been played, or indeed the absorbing fascination of calculation, counting, and quick-wittedness that were crucial for the gratification of expert play.

NOTES

[1] A. Topsfield, *Court painting at Udaipur*, Zurich: Artibus Asiae Supplementum 44, 2002, p. 180, fig. 155.

[2] See H.J.R. Murray, *A history of board games other than chess*, Oxford, 1952, pp. 32–40, with references to earlier literature; W.N. Brown, "The Indian games of pachisi, chaupar and chausar", repr. in B. Krishnamurti, ed., *Studies in Indian linguistics: M.B. Emeneau Shastipurti volume*, Poona, 1968, pp. 46–53; D. Parlett, *The Oxford history of board games*, Oxford, 1999, pp. 42–51; I.L. Finkel and A. Morrell, *The game of chaupad (pachisi)*, Calico Museum of Textiles: Monograph Folder Series no. 2, Ahmedabad, 2002; I.L. Finkel, "Round and round the houses: The game of pachisi", in C. Mackenzie and I.L. Finkel, eds., *Asian games: The art of contest*, New York, 2004, pp. 46–57.

[3] M. Soar, "India in the history of backgammon", in I.L. Finkel, ed., *Board games in perspective*, London, forthcoming; and her article "Shiva and Parvati at Play" in the present volume.

[4] E. Falkener, *Games ancient and oriental*, London, 1892, p. 257.

[5] This tradition is unsupported by contemporary Mughal historical sources; it has been suggested that the famous red sandstone seat is not quite up to Akbar's taste and quality, and even that the flagstone board itself might rather be the work of a successor such as Muhammad Shah (1719–48): see, for example, M.A. Husain, *A guide to Fatehpur Sikri*, Delhi, 1937, p. 18. As for earlier evidence, in the 1950s Russian investigators discovered a board game called *pachiz* in Khoresm that was used as a competitive and rather brutal physical test for young men. Rules and other details make it certain that the underlying game must have been an import from India, probably during the Kushana period (1st–3rd century CE); if correct, this would in fact be the earliest indication for the existence of Indian pachisi. For the present, see I.L. Finkel, "Pachisi in Arab garb", *Board Game Studies* 5, 2002, pp. 65–78 and references.

[6] H. Blochmann tr., *The 'Ain-i Akbari of Abu'l Fazl 'Allami*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1872, pp. 315–16 [and reprints]. Francis Gladwin's *Ayeen Akbery, or the Institutes of the Emperor Akber*, London, 1800, vol. II, pp. 253–55, anxious not to overtax his readers, reduces Abu'l Fazl's original account of "chowper" to the following bald summary:

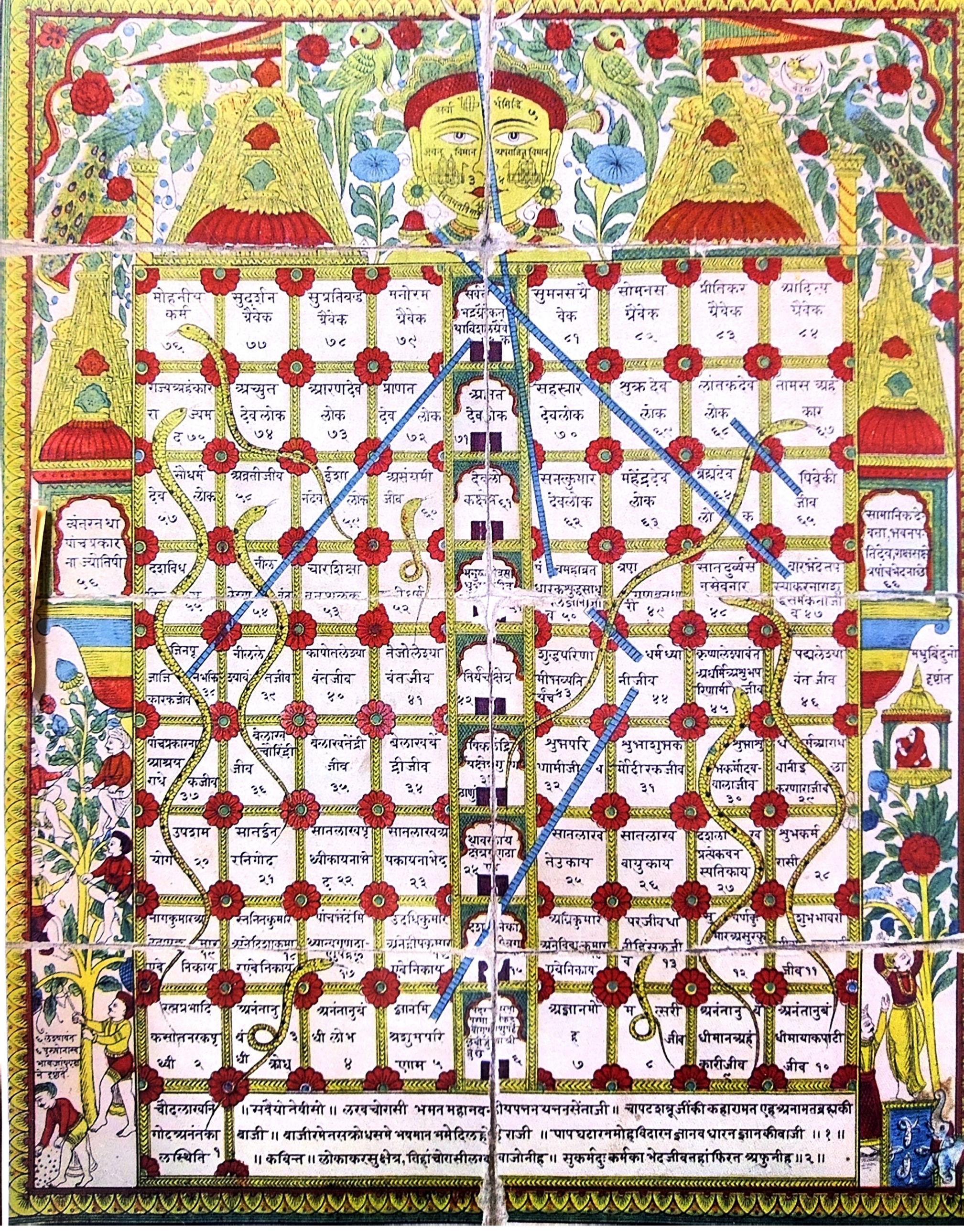
> This is a very ancient Hindustany game. There are sixteen pieces of one form, but of four different colours, and they all move in the same direction. Frequently four people sit down together at this game, each having his respective adversary, and playing with four pieces of the same colour. There are three dice, having on one side one spot, on another two, on the third five, and on the fourth side six spots.
>
> The table is composed of two parallelograms, intersecting each other at right angles; and each of the four sides of this cross is divided into twenty-four equal parts, a square space being left in the centre of the whole, as is shewn in the following figure.
>
> [Gladwin's printed diagram shows no marked squares]
>
> Each player places a piece on the sixth, and another on the seventh square of the middle line of the division which fronts him; and one piece on the seventh, and another on the eighth square of the lower line of the division on his right. The pieces begin moving to the right, and proceed all round the table on the outer line till they come to the top of the middle line again. When the pieces are brought round to the sixth and seventh squares of the middle line, it is called a sure game, and from that situation he must throw the number that will exactly carry his pieces into the space in the centre, which concludes the game.

[7] See R.C. Temple, *The legends of the Punjab*, Bombay, 1884, I, pp. 243–45. Temple's informative account of pachisi in this book retains its importance. For a recent overview of dice from India and elsewhere, see I.L. Finkel, "Dice in Asia", in *Orientations*, 35–36, 2004, pp. 56–60.

[8] Blochmann, tr., *'Ain-i Akbari*, pp. 316–18.

[9] On this point, see the excellent overview of the game given in H. Parker, *Ancient Ceylon*, London, 1909, pp. 611–14.

[10] For the development of pachisi in the West, see I.L. Finkel, "The sedentary games of India: An introduction", in N. Roy and A. Ghosh, *Sedentary games of India*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1999, pp. 1–21, and references given there.


मोहनीय कर्म ७६
सुदर्शन ग्रैवेक ७७
सुप्रतिबद्ध ग्रैवेक ७८
मनोरम ग्रैवेक ७९
सर्वतः भद्र ग्रैवेक
सुमनस ग्रैवेक ८१
सोमनस ग्रैवेक ८२
प्रीतिकर ग्रैवेक ८३
आदित्य ग्रैवेक ८४
राज्यअहंकारा ज्यम ७५
अच्युत देवलोक ७४
आरणदेव लोक ७३
प्राणत देव लोक ७२
आनत देवलोक ७१
सहस्रार देवलोक ७०
शुक्र देव लोक ६९
लांतकदेव लोक ६८
तामस अहंकार ६७
सौधर्म देव लोक ७७
अव्रतीजीव ७८
ईशानदेव लोक ७९
असंयमी जीव ८०
देवलोक कल्पवृक्ष ८१
सनत्कुमार देवलोक ६२
महेंद्रदेव लोक ६३
ब्रह्मदेव लोक ६४
विवेकी जीव ६५
अंतरनथा पांचप्रकार ना ज्योतिषी ७६
दशविध
चारशिक्षा
भवनपति देव ८२
असुरकुमार ८३
नागकुमार ८४
सुवर्णकुमार ८५
विद्युत्कुमार ८६
अग्निकुमार ८७
द्वीपकुमार ८८
दिक्कुमार ८९
पवनकुमार ९०
स्तनितकुमार ९१
उदधिकुमार ९२
सामानिकदेव वना, भवनपतिदेव, राक्षसादे वपांचभेदवाळो ६६
पंचमहाव्रत धारकशुद्धसाधु ५०
वाणव्यंतर देव ५१
ज्योतिषी देव ५२
सानदुर्व्यसनसेवनार ४८
चारभेदतप स्याकरनारागइ इत्यादिकनाजी व ४७
जिनपूजा ज्ञानि कारकजीव ३८
नीललेश्यावंत जीव ३९
कापोतलेश्या वंतजीव ४०
तेजोलेश्या वंतजीव ४१
तिर्यंचक्षेत्र ४२
शुद्धपरिणामी मोक्षव्यति र्यंच ४३
धर्मध्यानी जीव ४४
कृष्णलेश्यावंत अधर्मिष्ठअशुभपरिणामी जीव ४५
पद्मलेश्यावंत जीव ४६
पांचप्रकारना आश्रयसाधे कजीव ३७
बेलाख बेइंद्री जीव ३६
बेलाखचेंद्री जीव ३५
बेलाखचेंद्री जीव ३४
पंचेंद्रिय क्षेत्र ३१
शुभपरिणामीजीव ३२
शुभाशुभकर्मोदीरकजीव ३१
शुभाशुभकर्मोदय-वालाजीव ३०
संख्यातभवानीआयुष्य करणाराजीव २९
उपशम योग २०
सानईन रनिगोद २१
सानलाखपृथ्वीकायनाभेद २२
सानलाखअप्कायनाभेद २३
थावरकाय क्षेत्र २४
सातलाख तेउकाय २५
सातलाख वायुकाय २६
दशलाख प्रत्येकवनस्पतिकाय २७
शुभकर्मराशी २८
नागकुमारथी स्तनितकुमार पर्यंत दशभवनपति निकाय १९
पांचइंद्रिय ज्ञानावरणादि-पूर्वबद्ध १७
उदधिकुमार थी द्वीपकुमार एवेनिकाय १८
अग्निविद्युत्कुमार एवेनिकाय १६
परजीवधारीदिंसकजीव १३
सुवर्णकुमारथी असुरकुमार १२
शुभभावरी जीव ११
रत्नप्रभादि कसोत्तनरकपृथ्वी २
अनंतानुबंधी क्रोध ३
अनंतानुबंधी लोभ ४
ज्ञानमि अशुभपरिणाम ५
अज्ञानमोह ७
मसरी जीव ८
अनंतानुबंधीमानग्रहकारीजीव ९
अनंतानुबंधीमायाकपाटीजीव १०
लेश्यावंत पुरुषनाभाव जाणपूरवक ने दृष्टांत
मधुबिंदुनो दृष्टांत
चौदलाखनि गोदअनंतका लस्थिति १
॥ सर्वयोनेर्यामो ॥ लखचोरासी भमत महानव- वाजी ॥ वाजीरमेनरसक्रोधसमे भयमान ममेदिलहे
कीयपचन यननसेंनाजी ॥ चापटशबूजींकी कहारामत एहअनामतब्रह्मकी राजी ॥ पापघटारनमोहविदारन ज्ञानव धारन ज्ञानकीवाजी ॥ १ ॥
॥ कविन्त ॥ लोकाकरसुक्षेत्र, विहांचोरासीलख वाजोनीह ॥ सुकर्मदुःकर्मका भेदजीवनहांफिरत अफुनीह ॥ २ ॥

INSTANT KARMA

THE MEANING OF SNAKES AND LADDERS

Gyan Chaupar / Moksha Patam

ANDREW TOPSFIELD

Many of us played Snakes and Ladders when young. Racing our pieces up and down the board to the throw of a die, we cheered when speeding up the ladders and wailed when plunging down the snakes. The principle of the game is a simple but entertaining one. In the Indian subcontinent, as elsewhere, it continues to amuse children and perhaps teach them the capriciousness of chance or fate. Few, however, are aware that this game was conceived in India several centuries ago, that it was played by adults, or that its now almost universal, simplified Western version is a shallow thing indeed, compared with the philosophical subtleties and spiritual profundity of its traditional Hindu, Jain, and Islamic precursors.

Known across north India as gyan chaupar, "the chaupar of knowledge (*jnana*)", or gyan bazi, "game of knowledge", Snakes and Ladders was not only a pastime or diversion but had an edifying, instructive purpose. Its theme was no less than the spiritual quest for liberation from the bondage of karma and the hindrances of the passions. The players' pieces would progress, according to the throw of dice or cowry shells, from states of illusion, worldly vices, or hells in the lower squares of the board, to ever higher realms of consciousness, the various heavens, and so ultimately to Enlightenment or union with the Supreme.

Usually painted and inscribed on cloth or paper, boards for gyan chaupar were naturally ephemeral, being subject to wear and tear or neglect, and the few dozen examples known to survive date only from the 18th to early 20th centuries.[1] But in its Jain and Hindu forms at least, the game must have developed much earlier, possibly well before the Mughal period.

Jain gyan chaupar boards

> Like gamesmen, the living beings on the gaming board of Samsara [the cycle of rebirth] are carried away by the dice [or: senses], but when they see you, O Jina, the place of refuge [or: square on a game board], they become free from possession by prison, slaughter and death.
>
> – Dhanapala, *Rishabhapanchashika* (late 10th century)[2]

While we can only speculate at present as to the origins of gyan chaupar, it is likely that the classic game, with its defining imagery of snakes and ladders, may have developed first

1. Jain 84-square gyan chaupar board on paper. Printed at Bombay, 1902. Private collection.

among the pious Jains of western India: initially, perhaps, with a purely didactic purpose, but soon also with a ludic or playful one.[3] Of all the main types of gyan chaupar, the painted cloth boards (*patas*) of the Jains reveal the most elaborate and consistent doctrinal systems of karmic classification. The high level of standardization and complexity of the Jain board terminologies and snake and ladder configurations, as seen in the extant 18th–19th century examples, suggests an extensive period of prior development.

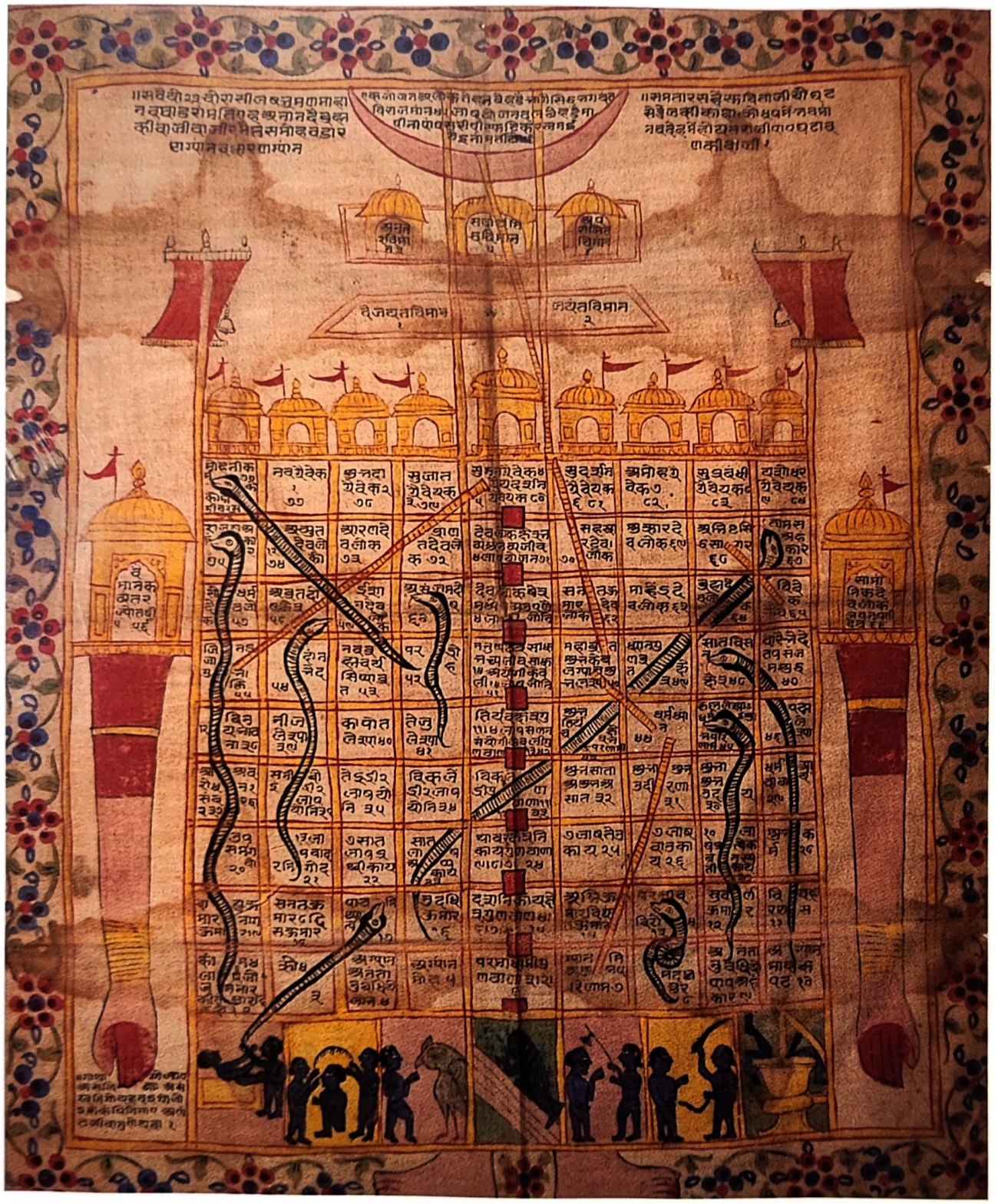
Theoretical begins →

The theory of karma and its manifold workings in relation to the journey of the individual soul (*jiva*) plays a central role in Jain doctrine and cosmology. One possible source for the Jain gyan chaupar board may perhaps have been rectangular grid diagrams, inscribed with karmic terms, which may occasionally have been used in western Indian doctrinal manuscripts to aid the explication of karma theory.[4] To clarify further the progress of the *jiva* from lower to higher states of being, the Jain scribes could perhaps have superimposed "ladders" (*shreni*: a key term in Jain doctrinal texts) on such diagrams, to indicate specific ascents of the soul in its progress towards liberation. To differentiate the upward *shreni* ladders from those showing the *jiva*'s intermittent falls or regressions occasioned by unpurged karmic impediments, the downward ladders could moreover have been remodelled – in a vivid graphic inspiration – in the contrasting form of snakes. Whereas ladders, in many cultures, connote the undeviating upward path to heaven, the sinuous, organic form of the snake, which in India is both feared and revered (in the form of *naga* serpent cults), would convey not only mortal danger but the fundamental energies of nature or the life force (embodied within the individual human organism as *kundalini* or the Tantric "serpent power"). The earliest karmic diagrams of this kind would no doubt soon have been expanded into larger didactic paintings on cloth (*patas*), and so also eventually into the familiar playing-boards for the game of gyan chaupar,[5] enjoyable as a pastime yet also of sufficient moral uplift to have been played ritually by the Jain laity at the Paryushana festival into modern times.

The snake and the ladder →

However this may be, the Jain gyan chaupar boards that have come down to us are wholly imbued with the ethos of karma theory. In its often interrupted ascent, the *jiva* gradually progresses from base or subhuman conditions to more virtuous states of being, the higher *loka* realms, the *vimanas* (palaces) of the Panchanuttara heaven, and beyond these, finally to Ishatpragbhara or Siddhashila, the blissful, crescent-shaped abode of perfected beings (*siddhas*) at the topmost point of the universe. In many boards these supreme heavenly zones are depicted as a compartmented or many-domed superstructure above the main playing area (figures 2 and 3). Alternatively, the board is conceived in the form of the *lokapurusha* or

2. Jain 84-square gyan chaupar board on cotton cloth. Rajasthan, dated 1735. Museum of Indology, Jaipur. Photograph: Ilay Cooper.



3. Jain 84-square gyan chaupar board on cotton cloth. Rajasthan, 19th century. Present location unknown.

Cosmic Man, whose protruding head contains these heavenly zones (figures 1 and 4). Apart from this main variation, Jain boards are notably conservative in their format. The 84 numbered squares are arranged in a 9 x 9 grid with three additional squares (1, 56, 66) projecting at bottom left and at either side. The arrangement of snakes and ladders and their connecting patterns is also very consistent. Usually nine snakes lie in wait to demote the journeying *jiva*, while six ladders stand ready to assist its rise. The final snake, encountered in the topmost left square, is usually *mohaniya-karma*, the residual karmas which bring confusion and desire to the as yet unperfected soul. More dangerous still are the two preceding snakes, pernicious types of ego-consciousness (*tamas-ahankara* and *rajas-ahankara*), which propel the player far down to the earliest stages of the game again.

Most extant Jain boards were produced in Gujarat or Rajasthan. The earliest dated

example known is from Rajasthan, possibly Mewar, and was made in 1735 (see figure 2). It is quite plain in design apart from the peripheral peacocks, and its rubbed condition suggests long use and handling. A stained but otherwise better preserved 19th-century board, also on cotton cloth (see figure 3), is notable for its unusual combination of the heavenly palace (*vimana*) type of superstructure with the residual arms and feet of the Cosmic Man from the *lokapurusha* type of board. Below the playing area there appear crude but instructive vignettes of the torments of hell, while the heavenly realms form a more alluring array of *chhatri*-domed pavilions with flags and banners. In a boldly painted but attractive *lokapurusha* board of 1834 (see figure 4), peacocks as well as stylized vegetation are again deployed, with a practised hand, as filler details around the playing area. This decorative tendency is

4. Jain 84-square gyan chaupar board on cotton cloth. Gujarat, dated 1834. 63 x 63 cm. Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.

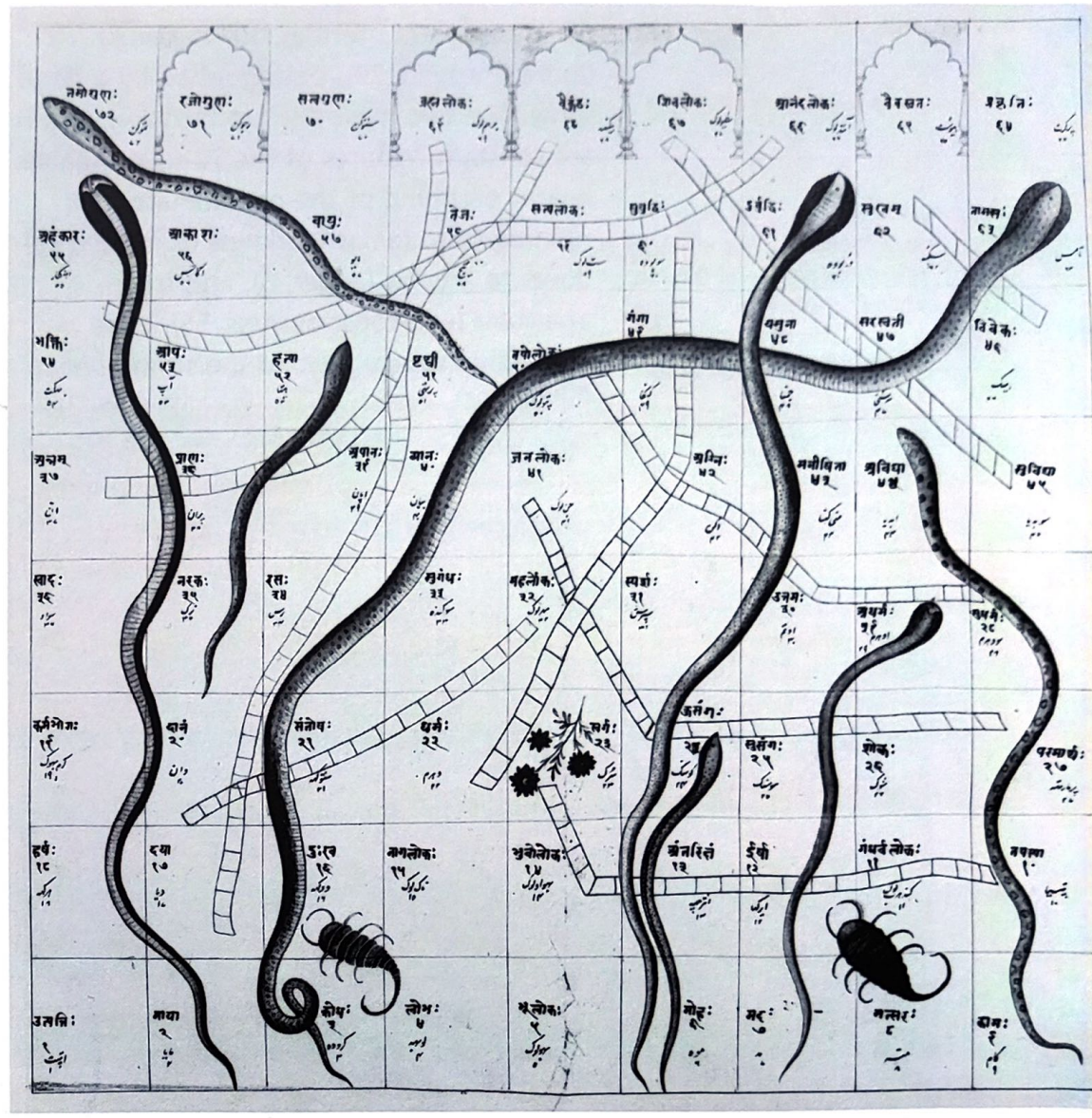
further developed in a late printed version of a *lokapurusha* board, produced at Bombay in 1902 (see figure 1). Edifying scenes appear, such as the tree and six men on the left, illustrating the six *leshya*s or karmic taints which impregnate the soul, while the sky is a riot of peacocks, parakeets, sun, moon, domes, and foliage.

Hindu gyan chaupar boards

> Gyan chausar, or the "Chess of Knowledge", is a game much played by Hindus, especially those of the Brahman caste... It is very popular with pious Hindus, as it forms at once a pleasurable amusement, and an instructive lesson on the best means of attaining to heaven.
>
> – G.R. Dampier, I.C.S. (1895)[6]

Traditional Hindu gyan chaupar boards show a far greater diversity of format than those of the Jains. They too seem to have developed over a period of several centuries. Their board terminologies reveal a rich conceptual layering of Sankhya, Yoga, Vedanta, or Tantric philosophy, with a strong unifying thread of the *bhakti* devotionalism which prevailed in north India from the 13th century onwards. The Hindu game could perhaps have developed, in emulation of the Jain model, at a relatively early phase of the *bhakti* era. According to a Maharashtra tradition, probably more hagiographical than historical, the local form of gyan chaupar called *mokshapata* (board of enlightenment) was designed by the "great yogi Jnaneshvara [or Jnanadeva; d. 1290] for the sake of bringing relief to those oppressed by Samsara".[7]

Hindu boards are predominantly Vaishnava in inspiration, with Vaikuntha (the heaven of Vishnu) as the winning square (Shaivite boards are much rarer). The earliest datable example, now in the British Library (figure 5), was commissioned at Lucknow in the early 1780s by the British official Richard Johnson, as one of a group of designs for Indian games (also including a unique example of ganj or "Treasure"[8]). It is a good example of the 72-square (8 x 9) Vaishnava board, the most common type of all, found across the subcontinent as far as Nepal (where the game is known as *nagapasa* or "snake-dice"). The board design has eight ladders, eight snakes, and two scorpions, the latter being a unique feature. The square names are given, unusually, in the Persian as well as Devanagari script. The aim as always is to reach the winning square of Vaikuntha, the heaven of Vishnu, at the centre of the top row (68). A direct ladder to it leads appropriately from *bhakti* or devotion (54). Two longer ladders take the players from *suvidya* (right understanding, 45) and *daya* (mercy, 17) to the adjoining heavens of Shiva and Brahma (67, 69), thus falling just short of Vaikuntha or overshooting it and having to travel onward and possibly downward again. Other intermediate ladders run from *dharma* (moral and religious law, 22) to *subuddhi* (right understanding, 60), and



5. Vaishnava 72-square gyan chaupar board on paper. Lucknow, early 1780s. 52 x 52.5 cm. The British Library (India Office Collections), London.

from *tapasya* (austerities, 10) to *svarga* (Indra's heaven, 23), distinguished by a floral spray. The two most disastrous snakes, which are constant features of the 72-square game, lurk at each end of the penultimate row, running from *tamas* (darkness or inertia, 63) down to *krodha* (anger, 3), and from *ahankara* (ego-consciousness, 55) – one tantalizing square beyond the saving *bhakti* ladder (54) – down to *maya* or illusion (2), near the start of the game. A third perilous snake, here running from *durbuddhi* (wrong understanding, 61) to *moha* (attachment, 6), is often mercifully shortened or omitted in other boards.

While the Lucknow board is schematic and relatively unadorned, those produced in Rajasthan and elsewhere, often for wealthy or noble patrons including the Rajput nobility and their zenanas, are more richly decorated with floral borders and depictions of deities above the playing area. In an early 19th-century example from Marwar or southern Rajasthan (figure 6), Vishnu in the form of Krishna presides in regal fashion against a *gaddi* or cushion, flanked by Shiva, Brahma, and the sun and moon gods Surya and Chandra, in correspondence with their respective heavenly realms in the row of squares below. There are a number of variations in the board design: for example the snake of *ahankara* (55) demotes the player not to *maya* (2) but to the very start of the game, at *janam* or birth (1). Much greater variations of an iconographic kind are seen in the Nepalese 72-square boards for *nagapasa* (figure 7). Ladders, in particular, are shown as benign, upward red snakes, in contrast to the malign, downward black snakes. Moreover, the winning square *Vaikuntha* or *Vishnuloka* (68) is reached by a white polycephalous snake running upward from *bhakti* (54), evidently the cosmic serpent Shesha. In this elaborate 19th-century board all the squares are occupied by deities, Buddhas and other figures, showing a characteristic Nepalese fusion of the Hindu and Buddhist iconographies. The malign snake squares of *tamas* (63) and *ahankara* (55) are visualized as fierce, many-armed Tantric deities.

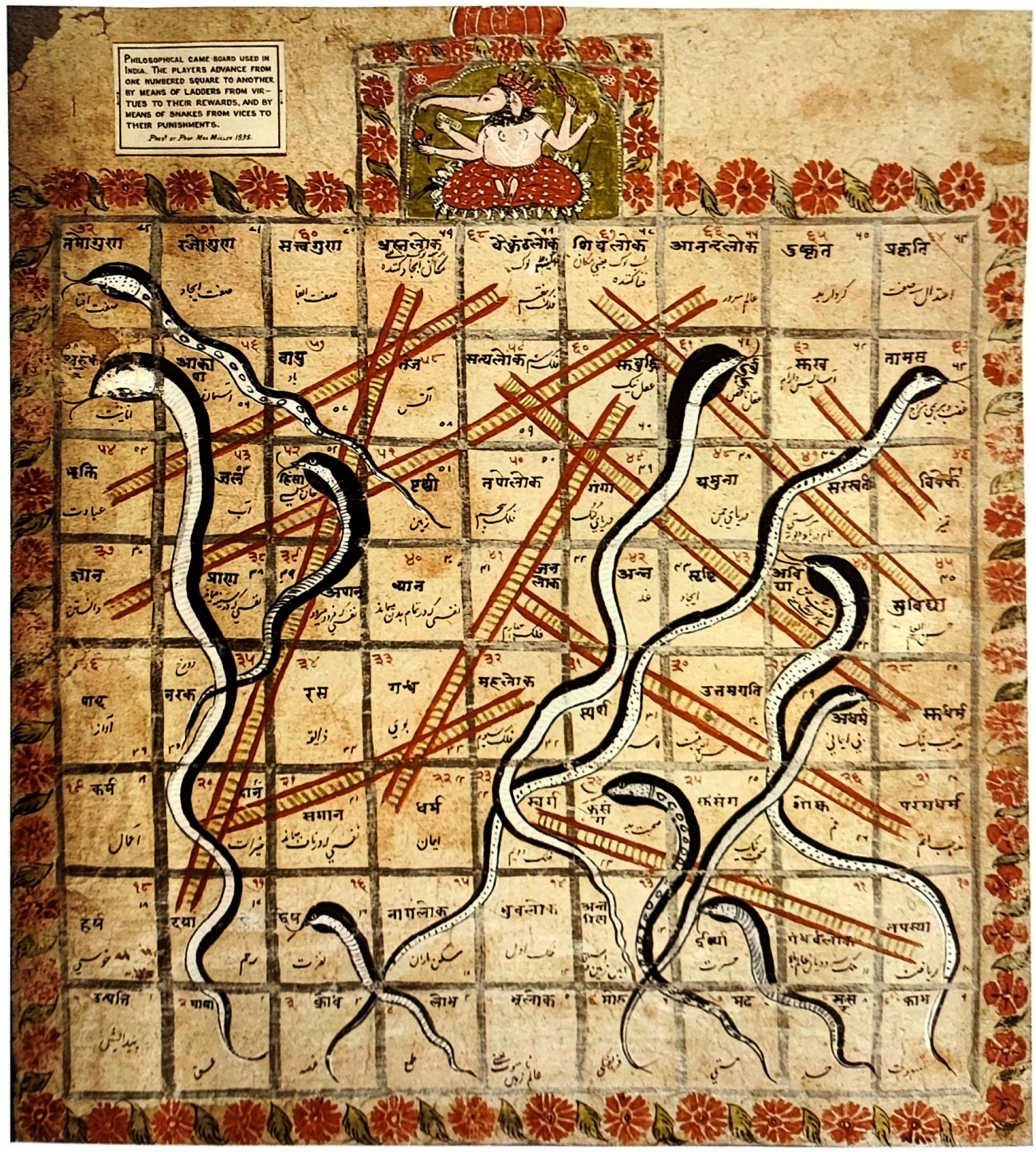
A very interesting 19th-century board from the Punjab or Rajasthan was presented to the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, in 1895 by the famous Indologist Max Müller (figure 8). It still bears an original museum label describing it as a "Philosophical game board used in India", next to its folkish presiding image of Ganesha. The square inscriptions in Persian here are a unique feature, being not mere transcriptions of the Devanagari Sanskrit-Hindi terms, but attempts to translate them into their Islamic (or Sufi) equivalents. Thus *bhakti* (54) is rendered as "prayer" (*'ibadat*), and *Vaikunthaloka* (68) as "the seventh heaven" (*fulk-i haftom*). A ladder from *tapasya* or *riazat* (austerities, 10)

6. Vaishnava 72-square gyan chaupar board on paper. Southern Rajasthan or Marwar, early 19th century. Late Sangram Singh of Nawalgarh collection, Jaipur.

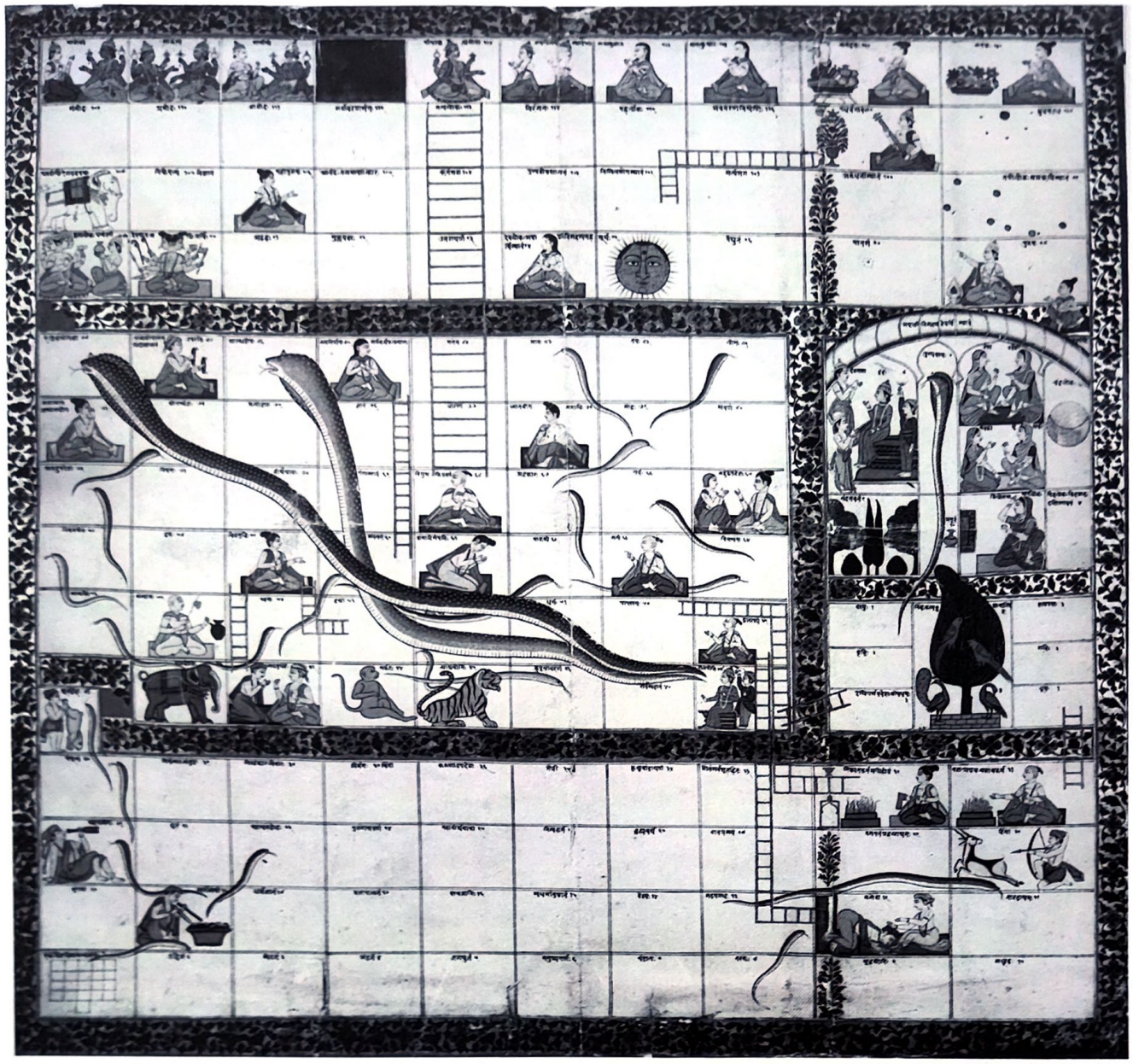
7. Vaishnava 72-square gyan chaupar board on cloth (?). Nepal, 19th century. Private collection, Germany. Photograph: Joachim Bautze.

leads to *svarga* ("second heaven", 23), and another from *suvidya* or *husn al-'ilm* (right knowledge, 45) leads to *Shivaloka* (realm of Shiva, 67) or "the attainers of *fana*" (the Sufi term for mystical union with God). Both versions agree in rendering the snake of "bad company" (*kusang* or *suhbat-i bad*, 24) as ending in drunkenness (*mada* or *masti*, 7). This board was evidently designed for use by moderately free-thinking Muslims as well as by Hindus, perhaps even playing together at the same time.

Hindu boards in much larger formats are quite common and vary considerably in scale and design. A unique and very accomplished example is a 124-square board from Maharashtra (figure 9), presented to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1831 and described at the time as "a coloured drawing on plan of the Shastree's game of heaven and hell".[9] Its Sanskrit square terminology has little in common with that of 72-square gyan chaupar, and the underlying logic of its sequential progression is sometimes obscure. Some of the squares bear appropriate illustrations, such as the "drinker of spirits" (21) and the hunter (standing for *himsa* or "injury", 30) in the third row. Very unusual also is the irregular compartmentation of the playing area, within an overall 14 x 10 grid,



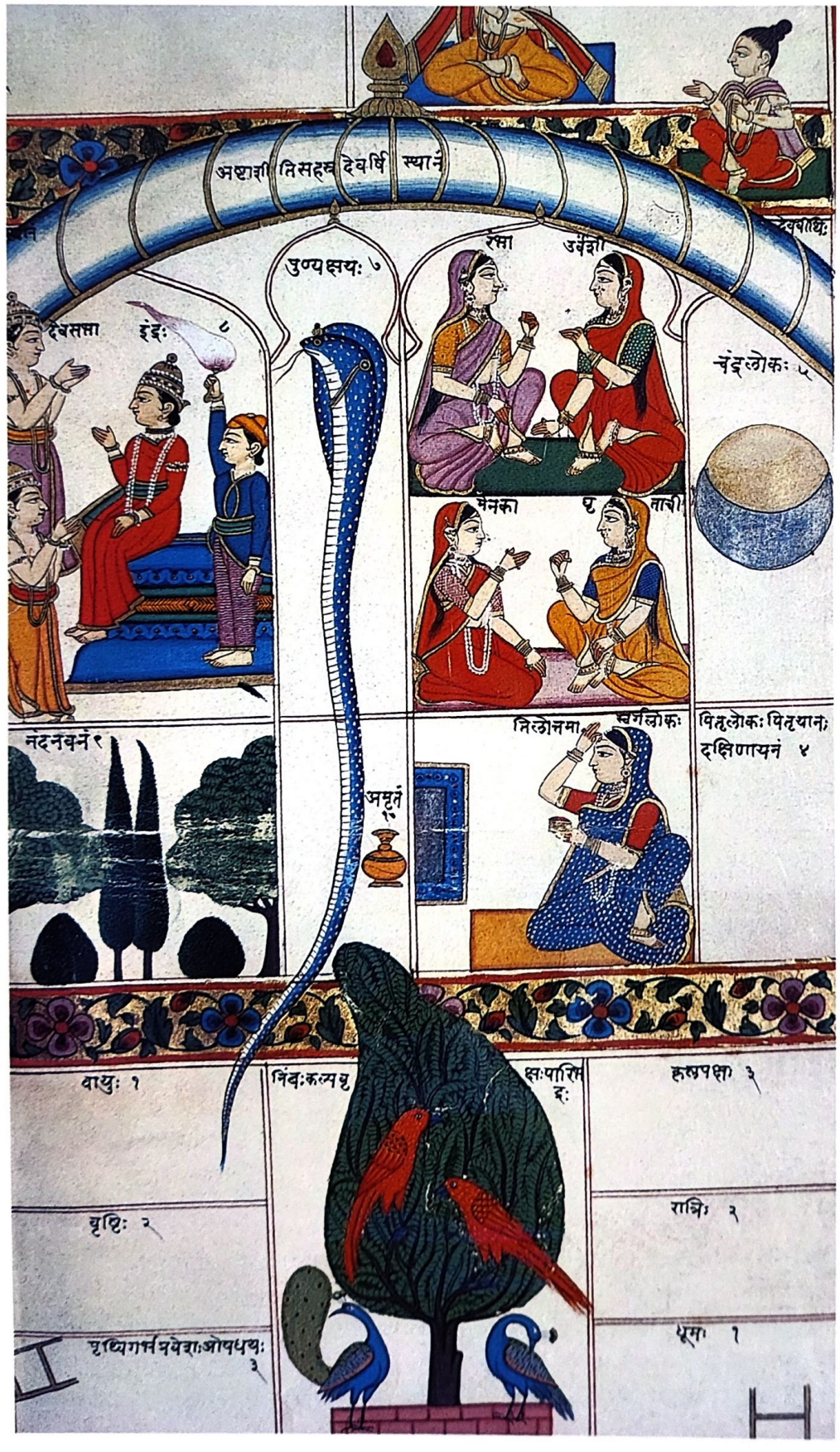
8. Vaishnava 72-square gyan chaupar board on paper. Punjab or Rajasthan, 19th century. 57 x 52 cm approximately. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.



9. Vaishnava 124-square gyan chaupar board on paper. Maharashtra, early 19th century. 84 x 90 cm. Royal Asiatic Society, London.

into four separate zones defined by broad floral bands. In the lowest horizontal zone, the player starts at square 1 in the "21 general hells", but things soon improve: by square 6 he becomes a human being, by 16 a kshatriya (member of the warrior caste), and by 25 he is performing major pilgrimages (*mahatirthayatra*). The next zone above begins with the pictorial square 42 or "elephant birth", with "monkey" and "tiger" births following soon after. This zone abounds with snakes and complications. Two long thick snakes stretch from "one who begins at the end" (86) and "desire for this world's enjoyments" (88) down to "royal birth" (48, depicted as a raja). Moreover, from both "royal birth" and from the "sacrificial fires" or "interested action" square (31) at the right end of the previous row, short ladders convey the player into a kind of heavenly cul-de-sac with no obvious escape route (figure 10). Here the player seems to circulate, pleasantly but endlessly, among the realms of the moon, the heavenly *apsaras*es (shown as demure maidens), the court of Indra and his Nandana grove, the *amrita* (nectar of immortality), and the Wish-bestowing Tree, always sinking eventually down the snake of "waning of merit" into more elemental states of being ("wind", "rain" etc.). If you are a raja therefore, or one who performs ritual with spiritual self-interest, it would seem that no further karmic progress beyond Indra's heaven and its related zones is possible. (It should be remembered that the designer of the board was undoubtedly a brahmin). In the superior heavenly realms of the board's upper zone there are no more snakes. Vishnu is depicted presiding in the

10. Detail of figure 9, showing the cul-de-sac of Indra's heaven.



winning square 124 ("deliverance into the Supreme Brahma"), to which a prominent vertical ladder leads from *Vishnubhakti* (68, with a picture of a Vaishnava devotee). The preceding square is that of *ahankara* (egoism, 67), here not regarded as a heinous sin but generating only a tiny snake demoting the player to "harshness" (62).

The most ambitious form of gyan chaupar was the Large Pahari type, running to about 361 (19 x 19) or 380 (20 x 19) squares in all. Popular at the Rajput courts of the Punjab Hills in the late 18th to 19th century, this grandiose elaboration of the game can perhaps be attributed to the court of Maharaja Sansar Chand of Kangra (b. 1765, r. 1775–1823), known for his lifelong devotion to chess (and perhaps other board games also?) as well as to painting and music.[10] An early 19th-century example in a Kangra style (figure 11) has images of Vishnu flanked by Brahma and Shiva above, with demons cheerfully demonstrating the torments of hell below. The playing area is characteristically divided into left and right panels, each numbered 1–171, starting at the bottom left and right corners respectively. The board's central axis is formed by a column of unnumbered squares representing the ascending *loka* realms, from hells to heavens. At either side, two long vertical snakes stretch downwards, suggesting a Tantric visual association with the human spinal column and the serpentine *ida* and *pingala nadis*, the conduits of *kundalini* energy. These snakes both demote the player from square 154 (*trishna* or *asha*: "craving" or "hope") to square 9 (*sarvaloka*, "the whole world"). 13 snakes and 10 ladders originate in the left panel of the board, 16 snakes and 9 ladders in the right. In many cases these convey the player across the central divide and into the other panel. Altogether it makes for an unusually lengthy and complex game. But the Hill rajas and their courtiers no doubt had more than sufficient leisure hours for companionably rolling the dice and contemplating the mysteries of karma and the spiritual path.[11]

11. Vaishnava 342-square gyan chaupar board on paper, of the Large Pahari type. Punjab Hills, early 19th century. Chhote Bharany collection, New Delhi.

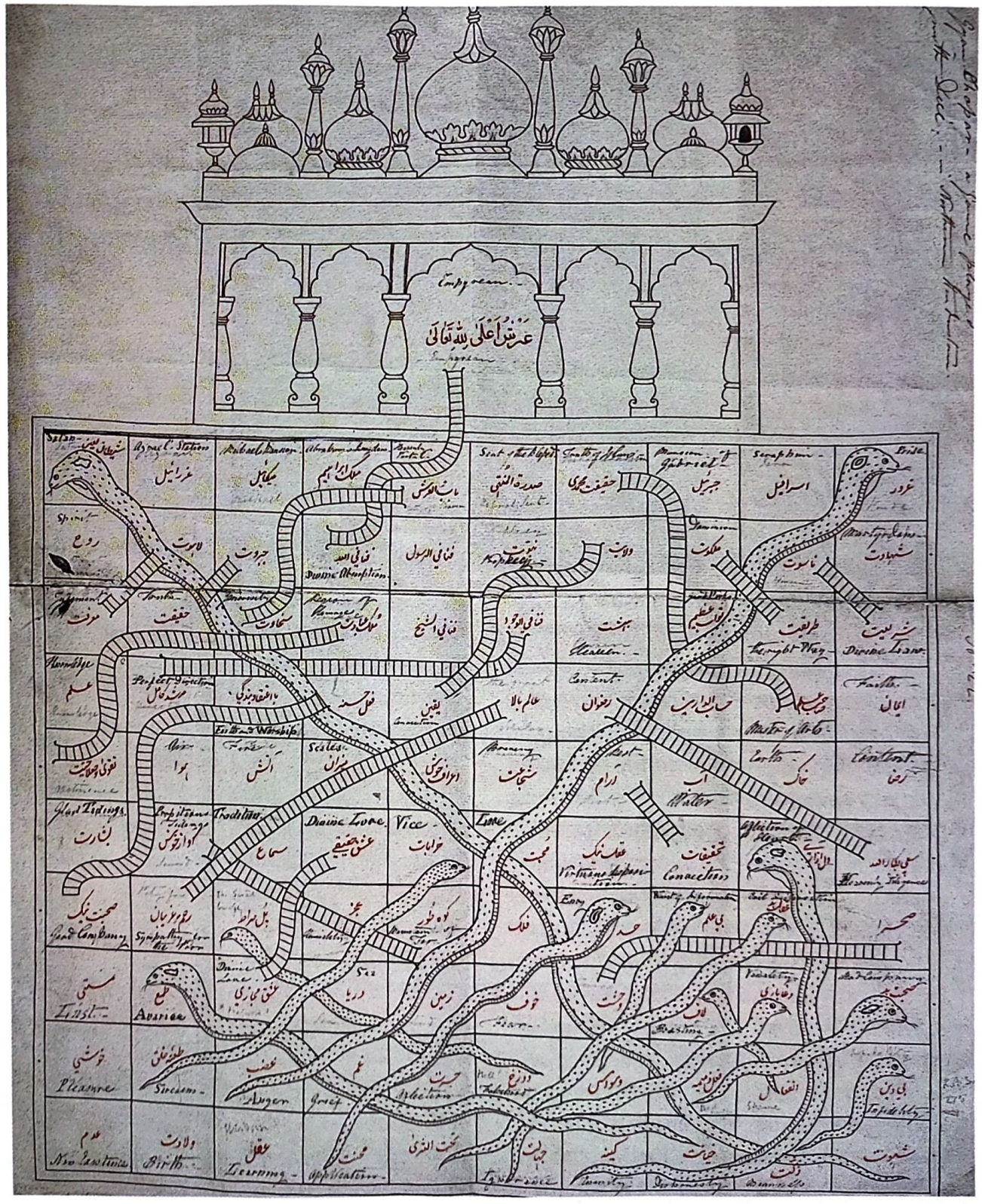
The Sufi game of gyan chaupar

> The "Chessboard of the Gnostics" [reveals to us] how to find our direction towards God, and how we are guided on the right path to Him when we sincerely turn to Him, by the means and modes which He approves, while struggling against the unlawful desires of the Lower Self and detecting its intrigues: while learning to recognize, ultimately, the desert places and the pitfalls encountered on the road.
>
> – Shaikh Muhammad al-Hashimi (1938)[12]

The tenets of Islam and the stages of the Sufi mystical path were as adaptable to the gyan chaupar format as had been the doctrines of the Jains and Hindus. This version of the game evidently developed in the Mughal period, possibly during the late 17th or 18th century and most likely in (distant) emulation of the *bhakti*-driven Hindu game. The board was expanded to an auspicious 100 (10 x 10) squares (the number of the names of God) or 101 if the Throne of Allah is counted. Only three examples are known, all dating from the first half of the 19th century. The earliest of these is the Royal Asiatic Society's board (figure 12),[13] commissioned or collected by Major-General Harriott in c. 1810 and inscribed by him: "Gyan Chapar – a game played with Dice – in Northern Hindustan". The unnumbered squares are inscribed in Persian or Arabic with the names of vices, virtues, and spiritual states. Starting from non-existence (1) and birth (2), the player progresses ultimately to the Throne of God above, housed within the central arch of a

late Mughal mosque. A direct ladder leads from *fana fi Allah* (mystical extinction in God, 84) to the Throne. There are 17 ladders and 13 snakes, mostly of moderate length. All but two of the snakes are concentrated in the lower half of the board, with names like greed, envy, infidelity, etc. As in the Hindu and Jain games, however, two very disastrous snakes are encountered near the end of the game. Crossing the board diagonally, "pride" (*ghurur*, 91) reduces the spiritual seeker to "anger, violence" (*ghazab*, 18), while *Shaitan* (Satan, 100), plunges him down to "lust" (*shahwat*, 10). Thus on the threshold of salvation, the devil still waits to lure the seeker astray.

Although this form of gyan chaupar seems to have lost popularity in north India by the late 19th century, it had by that time been transmitted, with slight modifications, to Sufi circles in Turkey and Syria. There the game became known as *shatranj al-'arifin* or "Chess of the Gnostics" and is traditionally attributed to the great



12. Muslim 100-square gyan chaupar board on paper. Ajmer or Delhi, early 19th century. 54.5 x 45.4 cm. Royal Asiatic Society, London.

Andalusian philosopher-mystic Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1290). A comprehensive spiritual commentary on its board terminology was composed by the Sufi Shaikh Muhammad al-Hashimi at Damascus in the 1930s (quoted above).

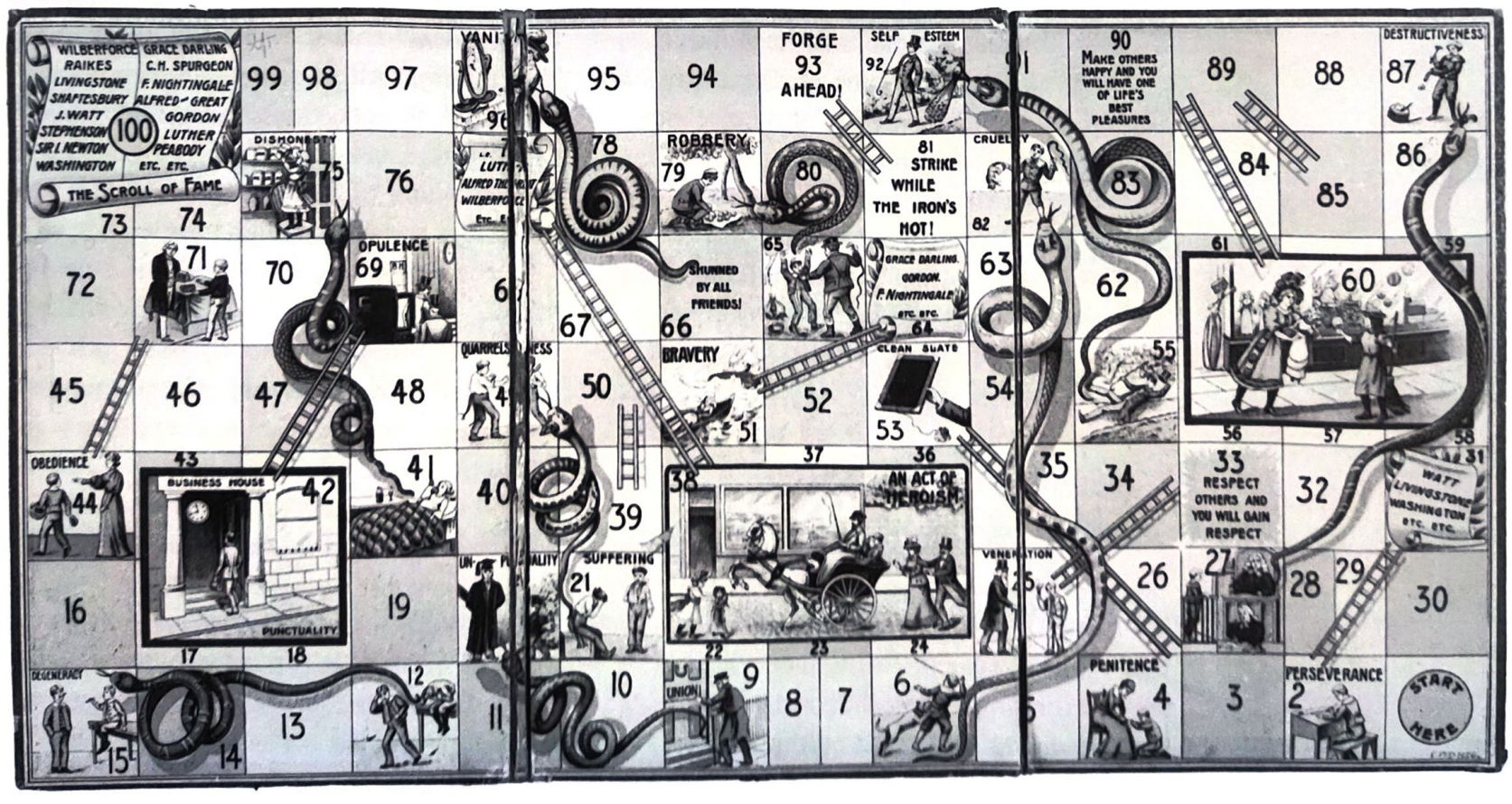
The game goes West

> "Gyan chausar" has, I am told, been lately introduced into England and, with ordinary dice for cowries and a somewhat revised set of rules, been patented there as a children's game.
>
> – G.R. Dampier (1895)

By 1900 gyan chaupar in all its forms was losing popularity, except among the conservative Jains of western India. But at this period, which saw the zenith of the British Raj, the game was taken up in England and so entered its modern phase of adaptation for children. The earliest versions of children's Snakes and Ladders began to appear in the 1890s. They were, in their sententious Victorian way, as moralistic as their remote Indian models, although this was partly a continuation of an established English tradition of morality games like "Virtue Rewarded and Vice Punished" (1818). An English Snakes and Ladders board of c. 1905 (figure 13), here shown also in its contemporary German edition (see pages 2–3), is full of moral exhortation and imagery. Ladders ascend from "penitence" (4) to "clean slate" (53), from "punctuality" (42) to "opulence" (69), or from "strike while the iron's hot!" (81) to "forge ahead!" (93); while snakes descend from "quarrelsomeness" (49) to "suffering" (21), or from "vanity" (96) to "shunned by all friends!" (66). In the winning square and elsewhere, "scrolls of fame" proclaim the names of the great to be emulated, such as Watt, Livingstone, Florence Nightingale, or General Gordon; in the German version indigenous luminaries such as Beethoven, Bismarck, and Frederick the Great appear.

Although such heavy-handed moralizing eventually fell out of fashion in Britain, Snakes and Ladders boards of the 1920s often still bore exotic images alluding to an Indian context, such as snake-charmers or mullahs ascending ladders (figure 14). But wartime economies in the 1940s ensured that only boards of a plain, numerical type were produced, and this has remained the general practice ever since.

13. Snakes and Ladders Game. Britain, c. 1900–05. Printed card. Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, London.



14. Mullahs ascending a ladder: detail from a British Snakes and Ladders board of the Chad Valley Company, 1920s. Printed card. Private collection.

The End of the Game
(or What does it all mean)?

> "Here we are", the Maharaja said, beaming as he ... began to produce box after box from his unrivalled collection: "Snakes and ladders, kismet, mokshapata, gyan chaupar, golokdham, nagapasha: the great aleatory game of divination and delusion, knowledge and ignorance, liberation and entrapment, virtue and vice, hope and fear, and all the other ups and downs of life. Is it by chance or luck that we win, by probability, fate, or destiny that we lose? A little bit of each, or none at all? Your guess is as good as mine."
>
> – Lee Siegel (2003)[14]

> Instant Karma's gonna get you
> Gonna knock you right on the head
>
> – John Lennon (1970)[15]

If a game can be said to have a message, that of gyan chaupar clearly went far beyond the simple stoical acceptance of life's ups and downs inculcated by the modern children's game. In all versions – Jain, Hindu, Muslim – the playing-field of the game is existence itself, with its manifold, seemingly unreconcilable dualities: hell and heaven, vice and virtue, ignorance and enlightenment. The play is similarly driven by a dynamic, dualistic opposition of the regressive snakes and ascending ladders, mirroring the conflict between karmic hindrances and spiritual progress. The snakes, indeed, with their powerful, organic undulations seem to embody not only the anarchic imperatives of the human passions but nature or the life force itself. (Is it more than coincidental in this context that the double-helix structure of DNA, the molecular building-block of life, resembles two entwined serpents?). Set in opposition to them are the ladders, representing the "straight path" of undeviating spiritual or yogic discipline, which will conduct the aspirant heavenwards through the confusion of existence.

So, when playing gyan chaupar, "is it by chance or luck that we win?" Well yes, since it *is* only a game. (Unless, of course, it is believed that quasi-divinatory karmic forces determine the fall of the dice and thus the outcome of the game.) Even so, the implicit message is an encouraging one. Eventually the game will end, the goal will be attained. Through right effort or devotion, karma is expunged, the ego transcended, ignorance vanquished. Snakes and ladders, as mere manifestations of *maya*, will fall away: *moksha* or salvation will be won.

NOTES

[1] For a brief account of some forty extant gyan chaupar boards (including many of those discussed here) and further remarks on the history of the game, see the articles by A. Topsfield, "The Indian game of Snakes and Ladders", *Artibus Asiae*, XLVI, 3, 1985, pp. 203–14, and "Snakes and Ladders in India: Some further discoveries", *Artibus Asiae*, LXVI, 1, 2006, forthcoming. The game has also recently been discussed in D. Parlett, *Oxford history of board games*, Oxford, 1999, pp. 91–94; and I.L. Finkel, "The ups and downs of life: The Indian game of Snakes and Ladders", in C. Mackenzie and I.L. Finkel, eds.,

Asian games: The art of contest, New York, 2004, pp. 59–63.

[2] Adapted from Micaela Soar's translation of this passage in her article "India in the history of backgammon", in I.L. Finkel, ed., *Board games in perspective*, London, forthcoming. It should be noted that the precise board game referred to here remains unclear: it could be backgammon or another race-game, perhaps a precursor of the later chaupar (pachisi) or else gyan chaupar (Snakes and Ladders).

[3] For further discussion see Topsfield, "Snakes and Ladders in India".

[4] One such diagram is reported by Vasantha Rangachar (personal communication) in a manuscript of the *Mahanishitha Sutra*, said to be of the 11th to 12th century, in a temple library at Satrunjaya; unfortunately no photograph is available.

[5] Whether Jain gyan chaupar was the first Indian board game to be thematically based on the spiritual path is questionable. It is possible that a Buddhist game based on spiritual promotion, some precursor of the later Tibetan Buddhist game of "The Determination of the Ascension of Stages", could have been current in India during the Pala-Sena period or earlier, presumably disappearing after the Muslim invasions of c. 1200 onwards. Analogous Buddhist promotion games are reported in China, although from the Tang period (618–907) a more worldly promotion game, based on career prospects in the Civil Service, mainly prevailed: A. Lo, "Official aspirations: Chinese promotion games", in Mackenzie and Finkel, eds., *Asian games*, pp. 65–75.

[6] G.R. Dampier, "A primitive game", *North Indian notes and queries*, Allahabad, May 1895, pp. 25–27 (chausar is an alternative spelling for chaupar). Gerald Dampier, a junior magistrate at Saharanpur, gives the first account of gyan chaupar in English in this short article describing a standard 72-square board and the local method of play. (Saharanpur lies in the northernmost plains, close to Dehra Dun and the Himalayan foothills: in Kipling's *Kim* [1901], Kim and the Lama rest there after their adventures in the mountains.)

[7] From the *Kridakaushalya*, part of Harikrishna's encyclopaedic work *Brihajjyotisharnava*, composed in 1871 (published Bombay, 1885): I am indebted to Professor S.Y. Wakankar for a transcription of this passage and to Jonathan Katz for his translation.

[8] Discussed by Simon Digby in the present volume.

[9] Presented to the Society by Major Henry Dundas Robertson; first published by F.E. Pargiter, "An Indian game: Heaven or hell", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1916, pp. 539–42.

[10] W.G. Archer, *Indian paintings from the Punjab Hills*, London, 1973, vol. 1, p. 251, quoting a letter of the traveller William Moorcroft.

[11] The comparative duration of Snakes and Ladders games has attracted the attention of mathematicians as a theoretical question: e.g. S. Althoen, L. King, and K. Schilling, "How long is a game of Snakes and Ladders?", *Mathematical Gazette*, 77, no. 478, March 1993, pp. 71–76; D. Daykin, J. Jeacocke, and D. Neal, "Markov chains and Snakes and Ladders", *Mathematical Gazette*, 51, no. 378, Dec. 1967, pp. 313–17. I am indebted to David Singmaster for these references.

[12] J.-L. Michon, tr., *Le Shaykh Muhammad al-Hashimi et son commentaire de L'Échiquier des Gnostiques (Sharh shatranj al-'arifin), un diagramme des étapes et des dangers de l'itinéraire initiatique attribué au Shaykh Al-Akbar, Muhyi al-din Ibn al-'Arabi*, Milan, 1998, pp. 72–73 (translation into English mine). The original Arabic text was published at Damascus in 1938 and has been reprinted as recently as 1988.

[13] Another, closely related paper board has recently come to light in an English collection. For the somewhat later board, of wood with mother-of-pearl inlay, in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, see Topsfield, "Snakes and Ladders in India".

[14] Lee Siegel, *Love and other games of chance: A novelty*, New York, 2003, pp. 224–25 [golokdham is a game played in Bengal from the late 19th to early 20th century]. This thoroughly ludic work of fiction by the Professor of Indian Studies at the University of Hawaii is probably the only novel to be structured on the game of Snakes and Ladders. The passage cited also includes a fantastical account of the game's history: a reference to "the oldest known set, purloined from Indian soil at Mohenjo Daro for display in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford..." is clearly intended in jest (as the author appears to confirm at p. 275).

[15] The Plastic Ono Band, *Instant Karma*, Apple Records, 1970.

GANJIFA

INDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD OF PLAYING CARDS

JEFF HOPEWELL

The origin and development of ganjifa

The game of ganjifa and the eight-suited pack of cards used in play originated in Persia (modern Iran), but it is in India that the game really flourished and the cards developed in a variety of forms. The word *kanjafah*, which may be of Persian origin, first appears at the beginning of the 15th century[1] and seems then to refer to a game with the pack of cards of four suits, each with 13 cards, now known as Mamluk playing cards. The earliest reference to an eight-suited pack is in a poem called *Rubaiyat-i Ganjifa* by the Persian poet Ahli Shirazi, dated to around 1514–15.[2] Since there is one suit of coins in the Mamluk pack and two in Persian ganjifa, it is highly likely that the latter resulted from a doubling up of the former. The word *ganjifa* makes its first appearance in India in 1527 in the diary of Emperor Babur, but no further description is given.[3] However, in the *Ain-i Akbari* by Abu'l Fazl (c. 1565)[4] there is a detailed account of not only an eight-suited pack but of an "ancient" twelve-suited pack. It is often said that ganjifa was introduced to India by the Mughals in the 16th century, but it is equally possible that it arrived earlier, when Turkman princes emigrated to the Deccan in the late 15th century. Certainly the earliest known design for a ganjifa card is attributed to Ahmadnagar (Maharashtra) and dated around 1580.[5]

Ganjifa practically died out in its homeland when the orthodox Shah Abbas II of Persia (1642–67) banned the game. Only one Persian pack of ganjifa survives, dating from around 1820–30, which may indicate a brief revival.[6] In India, however, the game and its cards spread over most of the country. Although initially played by Muslims, it was taken up enthusiastically by the Hindu population and the cards were adapted to suit their taste. Even now, in Orissa, cards are still being painted for use in the game of ganjifa, but elsewhere it has been entirely superseded by games played with the standard British pack.

1. Top: *Wazir* of *barat*. Middle: *Mir* of *barat* and *wazir* of *shamsher*. Bottom: *Mir* and one of *ghulam*. The top card: Deccan, possibly Hyderabad, 18th century. Tortoiseshell, diameter: 6.2 cm. The other cards: Rajasthan, 19th century. Painted on paper-board in imitation of tortoiseshell; diameter: 4.8 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

The eight-suited pack: Mughal ganjifa

Ahli Shirazi did not describe the cards in detail in his poem, nor give the rules of the game, but he did record the names of the eight suits. These are *ghulam* (servant), *taj* (crown), *shamsher* (sword), *ashrafi* (gold coin), *chang* (harp), *barat* (document), *tanka* (silver coin), and *qimash* (merchandise).[7] These represent the household of the court, treasury, armoury, gold mint, women's quarters (zenana), administration, silver mint, and stores, respectively. The names of the coin suits had changed by the time Abu'l Fazl wrote about ganjifa, attributing the invention of the eight-suited pack to Akbar himself. The gold coin is designated *surkh* (gold) and the silver coin, *safed* (silver). They are often identified with the sun and moon respectively, and faces may be depicted on the gold or silver discs. The suit signs remain unchanged to this day. The pack consists of 96 cards (eight suits of twelve cards each); ten of each suit are number cards and two are court cards: the *mir* (king) and *wazir* (minister). The *mir* is generally seated on a throne, though the *mir* of *ghulam* usually rides an elephant and the *mir* of *surkh* may be represented by the sun shining from behind one or more tigers. The *wazir* is usually on horseback, though the *wazir* of *ghulam* rides an ox, the *wazir* of *chang* a camel, and the *wazir* of *surkh* sometimes rides a tiger (figures 1–3). Mughal ganjifa do not have indices as modern cards do, but the suits have different coloured backgrounds to aid recognition. The form of the suit signs, the background colours, and the iconography vary from region to region. The numeral cards of the *ghulam* suit usually show little men sitting in rows or in an architectural structure, but in better-quality packs they may show the correct number of people engaged in scenes of everyday life. These can be the most interesting cards in the pack, though from the point of view of actually playing ganjifa, it is more difficult to count up the number of people to give the value of the card.

Some scenes occur quite frequently. A man smoking a *huqqa* often appears on the one (see figure 1), and four people playing *chaupar* on the four (see figure 3). Generally speaking, it is leisure pursuits or entertainments that are depicted. We find acrobats (see figure 2), wrestlers, swordsmen, musicians and dancers, performing animals, fights between elephants, and also birds which seem to be bulbuls. There are drinking parties, sometimes taking place under the palm-trees where toddy-tappers are at work, and people taking *bhang*. Huntsmen armed with a gun or bow and arrow stalk blackbuck or tigers or engage in archery practice (see figure 3). Soldiers march or are ferried in a boat; sometimes they are in action besieging a city. Ascetics meditate alone or receive visits from nobility; Islamic scholars study in a madrasa. Noblemen hold

2. *Mir* of *taj*, *wazir* and seven of *ghulam*, and *mir* of *surkh*. Deccan, mid-17th century. Paper, painted and lacquered; diameter: 6 cm. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen. Copyright National Museum of Denmark, Department of Ethnography.

court or are carried about in a palanquin and ladies bathe (see figure 3). All of these subjects are in the common repertory of the painters of Indian miniatures, but here they are on a much smaller scale, sometimes on cards no bigger than 2.9 by 2.3 cm.

The earliest existing ganjifa to which a date can confidently be assigned was acquired sometime before 1674 by the Danish Royal Ethnographic Museum. The only significant difference between this pack and later examples is that the *mir* of *surkh* shows the king seated with a large sun behind his head like a halo rather than a sun shining behind a tiger (see figure 2).

Orissa has its own versions of the eight-suited ganjapa (the Oriya word for ganjifa), and the suit signs have become almost unrecognizable. In particular the *ghulam* suit has become *gulab* (a rose) and this is what the suit sign represents. The most common pack has on the *wazir*, the hero Arjuna in an attitude of worship and on the *mir*, the object of his devotion, Vishnu as Navagunjara: in this form, the body of Vishnu is made up of elements of nine different creatures. Other packs show Krishna on the *mir* and Balarama or Radha on the *wazir*, or the *mir* may be in a temple chariot and the *wazir* on an elephant or a horse. The court cards for these packs will be the same in each suit, but other packs have eight different scenes on the *wazir* cards. One of these is known as *ashtamala*, the eight deeds of the young Krishna in which he conquers various demons. The lower two

3. Top: *Mir* and *wazir* of *surkh*, *wazir* and six of *qimash*.
Bottom: *Mir*, seven, four, and two of *ghulam*.
Probably from Rajasthan, 19th century. Painted on ivory; 6 x 3.7 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

4. Above: *Mir* and *wazir* of the *fula* suit of a *Ramayana* pack.
Below: *Mir* and *wazir* of the *kumancha* suit of an *Ashtamala* pack.
Both packs were painted in the early 1990s by the late Appanna Mahapatro of Chikiti. Painted on primed cloth; diameter: 8 cm.
Private collection.
Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

cards of figure 4 are the *mir* and *wazir* of the *kumancha* suit (equivalent to *qimash*), with Krishna and Balarama, and the child Krishna draining the life from the ogress Putana. Another shows eight scenes from the *Ramayana*. The top two cards of figure 4 are the *mir* and *wazir* of the *fula* (flower) suit (equivalent to *taj*), showing Rama and Sita enthroned with Hanuman and Lakshmana, and the release of Ahalya from a curse. This epic seems to be particularly popular amongst the card-players of Orissa, and one pack has a scene from the story depicted on each of the 80 numeral cards.[8]

There has always been scope for innovation in the design of ganjifa, and in several regions birds are sometimes used as suit signs instead of the standard symbols. Less frequently, animals are substituted, generally speaking only on cards made in Rajasthan. Illustrated in figure 5 are the *mir* of the goat suit, riding in a two-wheeled chariot, and the one of the elephant suit, the seven of lions, and the six of dogs. It is not known how many suits there were originally in this pack as it is incomplete, but

5. Four cards from an animal ganjifa. Rajasthan, 19th century. Painted on the back of imported British cards of the late 18th or early 19th century; 9.3 x 6.4 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

nine different types of animal are depicted, so the total was probably ten or perhaps even twelve. Animals also appear as some of the suit signs of the rare packs that are based on the *ashta dikapala*, the guardian gods of the eight main points of the compass.

The ten-suited pack: Dashavatara ganjifa

Cards based on the Dashavatara (the Ten Incarnations of Vishnu) probably came into being in the 17th century, possibly in the Deccan. This was an adaptation of the eight-suited Mughal *ganjifa*, and many cards from the Deccan show a similar iconography, with the avatar enthroned on the *raja* (king) card and on horseback on the *pradhan* or *mantri* (minister). Not surprisingly, the first two avatars, Matsya (half-human, half-fish) and Kurma (half-human, half-turtle) look rather incongruous, riding side-saddle. Elsewhere more seemly solutions were found to this problem. Figure 6 shows the *raja* of Matsya in a temple setting, a format that may be seen in the large cards that are still being painted today at Bishnupur in Bengal. Matsya and Kurma are to be found in every Dashavatara pack, as are the next five: Varaha (the boar), Narasimha (man-lion), Vamana (brahmin dwarf), Parashurama (Rama with the axe), and Rama (hero of the *Ramayana*). The next two incarnations vary from region to region. Krishna and the Buddha are generally acknowledged to be the eighth and ninth incarnations and they appear on ganjifa from Sawantwadi in Maharashtra and from parts of Rajasthan. Elsewhere in Rajasthan and at Nirmal in Andhra Pradesh, Balarama is substituted for his brother Krishna. At Kurnool, also in Andhra Pradesh, the card painters made Balarama the eighth incarnation but seem to have been uncertain whether to choose Krishna or Buddha for the ninth. It can probably be assumed that a deity with blue skin represents Krishna, whereas white skin denotes Buddha, and it is not unknown for the cards to show Krishna and the frieze of the Dashavatara painted around their box to show Buddha. The painters of Nossam, Andhra Pradesh, and Mysore, Karnataka, are consistent in choosing Balarama for the eighth and Krishna for the ninth incarnation. In Orissa the eighth is again Balarama (Balabhadra), but the ninth is Jagannatha, the form in which Krishna is worshipped at Puri. A variation on this comes from Bishnupur, in that Jagannatha is depicted with his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra. A pack which probably comes from Madhya Pradesh may be unique in following the Bishnupur model for the ninth

6. Two cards painted on ivory. Left: *Mir* of Matsya from a 19th-century pack painted in Murshidabad, Bengal. Diameter: 7.6 cm. Right: *Mir* of Kurma from an 18th-century pack painted in the Deccan, possibly at Sawantwadi. Diameter: 6.5 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

7. *Raja*s of Krishna, Jagannatha, and Narasimha and the *raja*, *pradhan*, and ten of Varaha. Probably Madhya Pradesh, early 20th century. Painted on paperboard; diameter: 7.2 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

8. The nine of Narada from a 32-suit pack. Mewar, Rajasthan, late 18th or early 19th century. Painted on wood; 9.2 x 6.5 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

incarnation and choosing Krishna for the eighth (figure 7).

There is no variation in the tenth incarnation, which is always Kalkin, Vishnu's final appearance when he will come on his horse to end the evil of the present age.

The suit sign for each incarnation is an appropriate symbol for the avatar, such as a fish for Matsya, a turtle for Kurma, and an axe for Parashurama. Other suit signs vary, again according to the region. Varaha is usually a boar or a conch shell; Narasimha a lion, lion's claw, or *chakra* (discus-like weapon); Vamana a water pot or parasol; and Rama, a monkey, bow, arrow, or quiver. Balarama's suit sign is a plough, club, or cow; Krishna, a cow, bust of a crowned figure, blue child, or *chakra*; Jagannatha, a lotus flower; and Buddha a lotus flower or bust of a crowned figure. A sword, horse, or parasol is the suit sign for Kalkin.

In some regions the *raja* or *pradhan* cards show a scene depicting the avatar in action, rather than on a throne or on horseback. These scenes can be particularly lively and entertaining. On the Matsya, Kurma, and Varaha cards, Vishnu is shown fighting the demons Hayagriva, Panchajana, and Hiranyaksha respectively. Less commonly found on the Kurma cards is the Churning of the Ocean, in which Vishnu as a turtle provides the base for Mount Mandara which is used as a twirling stick (see figure 6). The gods hold the tail of the serpent Vasuki, whose body is wrapped around the mountain, while the demons hold the neck. From the ocean appear various precious objects and beings. On the Narasimha card, Vishnu with a lion's head and claws is seen tearing the entrails from Hiranyakashipu, who is often depicted with the head of an ass on Rajasthani cards. On some cards Vamana stands before Vindhyavali, the wife of King Bali, who is seated on a throne behind her. Sometimes Bali is accompanied by the priest Sukra, who warned him not to grant Vamana's request for as much land as he could cover in three steps. Less frequently, Vamana is shown striding over Bali. Parashurama is depicted fighting Kartavirya, who has a thousand arms. Rama may be shown fighting Ravana, though more frequently he is enthroned with Sita and accompanied by Hanuman and Lakshmana. Krishna is portrayed in a variety of ways: playing his flute, in combat with King Kamsa, squirting *gopi*s with coloured water at the Holi festival, enthroned with Radha, or as a child in the arms of his foster-mother, Yashoda. Vishnu as Kalkin is always accompanied by his horse, which is usually white but occasionally blue.

Although the ten-suited Dashavatara pack is used in Orissa, it is more common in the Puri district to find packs of 12 and 16, sometimes even 20 or 24, suits. These packs retain the basic ten incarnations but they are supplemented by additional deities. The sons of Shiva, Ganesha and Karttikeya, appear in the twelve-suited pack and Shiva, Brahma, Yama, and Indra are added to make sixteen suits. Thereafter there is little consistency as to which deities head the further additional suits. There has always been a tendency to increase the number of suits in ganjifa. A late 18th- or early 19th-century pack from Mewar has no less than 32 suits (figure 8).

Twelve-suited packs

Given the propensity to adapt ganjifa to different themes and also the interest in astrology in India, it is not surprising that ganjifa packs were devised based on the zodiac, with suit signs to match. What is, however, surprising is that only two packs survive from earlier centuries, both of which are finely painted luxury articles, one on ivory. Perhaps this type of pack never had a popular appeal.

A twelve-suited pack has already been mentioned in connection with Orissa, but there is also another pack, unique to the former state of Sonepur. This is based on the protagonists of the *Ramayana*, with six suits representing Rama and his allies (Lakshmana, Hanuman, Sugriva, Jambavat, and Vibhishana) and the other six, Ravana, his son Indrajit, and his generals. The suit signs

9. *Ramayana* ganjapa from Sonepur, Orissa. Painted on primed cloth.
Top: *Pradhan* and *raja* of the Rama suit. Early 20th century. Diameter: 4.2 cm.
Second row: *Pradhan* and *raja* of the Rama suit.
A much simpler version of c. 1960. Diameter: 4 cm.
Third row: *Pradhan* and *raja* of the Lakshmana suit. 19th century. Diameter: 4.2 cm.
Bottom: *Pradhan* and *raja* of the Indrajit suit.
Early 20th century. Diameter: 4.3 cm. Private collection.
Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

are a monkey, a bear, a variety of weapons, and the hill that Hanuman uprooted to bring the healing herb from the Himalaya. Occasionally the suit signs are replaced by monkeys, bears, and soldiers, giving an even better impression of two armies massed for battle. The *pradhan* cards sometimes show scenes from the *Ramayana* which bear a remarkable resemblance to those on temple walls and palm-leaf manuscripts.[9] At figure 9, top row, on the *pradhan* of the Rama suit Vibhishana points to the chariot of Ravana (not shown), from which Rama has shot the ceremonial parasols. On the *raja*, Rama is shown in a *kandarpa ratha*, a chariot made out of female figures. The cards on the second row are also from the Rama suit, and on the *pradhan* Rama shoots the golden deer. The cards on the third row are from the Lakshmana suit; on the *pradhan*, Lakshmana straightens the arrow that killed Vali to send as a warning to Sugriva. In the early 20th century some cards were painted showing the *raja*s in motor cars rather than temple chariots (last row) and *pradhan*s on bicycles instead of horses.

10. Chamundeshvari Chad cards. Mysore, mid-19th century. Three court cards are illustrated: Rama on an elephant, Brahma on horseback, and the fortress of Mohini. The fourth is one of the zodiac cards, the Cancer of Surya. Painted on paperboard; diameter: 6.9 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

The Chad cards of Mysore

Most card games seem to develop over a period of time and, generally speaking, it is only in recent years that the names of their inventors have been recorded. However, in the 19th century Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (1794–1868) devised many different board and card games. He ruled Mysore from 1799 until he was deposed by the British in 1831, after which he had ample time to pursue his passion for games. In his writings on the subject, entitled *Shritattvanidhi*, he describes thirteen card games, requiring anything from 36 to 360 cards. The packs had up to 18 suits, each presided over by a particular god or goddess, and up to 18 cards in each suit, together with a number of additional cards, with a different role in the game, that did not belong to any particular suit. A representative example of these packs is the Chamundeshvari Chad, with 16 suits, of which one is headed by Chamunda, the patron goddess of Mysore. There are six "court cards" depicting the deity on an elephant, in a palanquin, on a chariot, on a horse, seated, and standing by a fort with banner flying. Then there are twelve "numerals", each distinguished by one of the twelve signs of the zodiac rather than by a number of pips (figure 10). In addition there are a further 25 cards depicting various goddesses and seven with a *hamsa* or goose, making a total of 320 cards. These cards and the games played with them did not gain much popularity outside the walls of the palace.[10]

Cards with European suit signs

The Portuguese settled in India early in the 16th century and undoubtedly brought their cards with them. Men in Portuguese dress even appear on ganjifa sets (see figure 1). It is, however, impossible to ascertain exactly when the local population started producing cards in imitation of the Portuguese

11. The kings of diamonds and spades, the queen of clubs, and jack of hearts. Sawantwadi, Maharashtra, late 19th century. Painted on card; diameter: 8.4 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

originals. The earliest existing examples date from the 18th century and have the usual structure of four suits (cups, coins, swords, and clubs), three court cards (king, knight, and knave), and seven numerals. On the aces, the suit sign is held by the Indian mythical creature, the *makara*, replacing the dragon (derived from the coat of arms of Portugal) of the original.

Later the British and French also settled in India, bringing their own cards, with what are to us the familiar suit signs. Again, it is difficult to say quite when these cards were adopted by Indian players. Existing examples date from the mid-19th century. Like the Portuguese cards they were adapted to local taste, with kings, queens, and jacks in Indian dress and settings. The workshops of Sawantwadi were major producers of playing cards, including Western-style 52-card packs.[11] In figure 11 are several court cards, with the king of spades seemingly posing for a studio photograph. The jack on horseback is a straight adaptation from the *wazirs* and *pradhans* of the Mughal and Dashavatara ganjifa.

In Orissa, some sets were painted with Rama on each of the kings, Lakshmana on the queens, and Hanuman on the jacks; others depict Vishnu, Lakshmi, and Garuda. Another variation shows each numeral card painted with one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the court cards being Vishnu himself, Shiva, and Brahma. The values on these cards are given by indices. In Sawantwadi, cards were produced in which the adaptation went even further. Each of the four suits was presided over by a different god – Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, and Ganesha – and their symbols – club, trident, scriptures, and elephant goad – used as suit signs.

From Tanjore, a pack of 80 cards is known that has the usual suit signs but nine court cards and eleven numerals (figure 12). They have been overpainted on printed cards of Belgian make dating to around 1875. Unfortunately we have no idea what game they were used for.

The manufacture of ganjifa

The cards are hand-painted on a variety of materials, ranging from ivory (see figures 3 and 6), mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell (see figure 1) to papier-mâché, paper, and stiffened cloth. They are usually round, and anything from 2 to 12 cm in diameter. An upright rectangular format was also used, generally for higher quality packs. Paints were traditionally made, often by the artists and their families, from natural materials, but now commercially produced paints are mainly used. Some cards are beautifully designed and executed, others are slapdash and cheaply produced, with newsprint still visible under the design. The backs are usually plain, but a few packs are elaborately

decorated on the reverse, though there must be absolute consistency in design, otherwise it might be possible to distinguish the value of the card by any variations. Boxes are often supplied for the cards, usually with similar designs to the cards. Figure 13 illustrates a set of delicately painted Dashavatara ganjifa from Nossam housed in an equally decorative box with a frieze of the ten incarnations around the sides and Krishna dancing on Kaliya on the lid. Ganjifa were made in many parts of the country, but are now only being painted in Bishnupur, Sawantwadi, Nirmal, and in Parlakhemundi, Raghurajpur, Sonepur and several other Orissan towns and villages. Orissa has long been a major region of card play and production: a charming illustration from a palm-leaf manuscript of the *Lavanyavati* romance by the poet Upendra Bhanja shows a card game in progress (figure 14).

Games

Ganjifa is a trick-taking game, like whist or bridge, but with strict rules governing what cards may be led. There are no trumps and no obligation to follow suit, if a player cannot win the trick. In half of the suits ten is the highest numeral and one the lowest, and in the other half the ranking is reversed.

There are usually three players, four when there are twelve or more suits in the pack, and all the cards are dealt out anti-clockwise. The *mir* or the *raja* of an agreed suit is led, and along with this card the player puts a low value card, called the "throne". With these cards he wins the first two tricks. Thereafter there are complex rules about which cards must be led next. If any player has the highest card in a suit he is obliged to play it if that suit is led. If he fails to do so, it loses its value.

12. Seven of the nine court cards and the ace of spades from an 80-card pack from Tanjore, c. 1875. Overpainted on cards from two printed packs made in Belgium; 9.5 x 6.5 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

Players have to remember what cards have been played, and particular skill is needed towards the end of a game to determine which of the middle-ranking cards may yet be used to win a trick when the higher ones have been played, and which can be discarded. The winner is the player who takes the most tricks.[12]

Naqsh is a gambling game rather like vingt-et-un and pontoon, though the target figure to reach is 17, not 21. Special packs of 48 cards are produced for the game in Bishnupur. In Orissa one suit of a pack is repeated, to make a total of 60 or 96 cards. However, it can also be played with a normal pack of Mughal ganjifa.[13]

These games are nowadays played only by the older generation. Most painters are also elderly and keep no stock of ganjifa, painting only to order; younger painters find that they can make more money by painting billboards. The art may survive a little longer as the cards become collector's items, but their use for play will undoubtedly cease in the not too distant future.

NOTES

[1] R. Ettinghausen, "Further comments on Mamluk playing cards", *Gatherings in honour of Dorothy E. Miner*, Baltimore, 1974, p. 74.

[2] Ettinghausen, "Further comments", p. 77.

[3] A.S. Beveridge, tr., *Babur-nama (Memoirs of Babur)*, repr. New Delhi, 1998, p. 584.

[4] Abu'l Fazl-i Allami, *'Ain-i Akbari*, tr. H. Blochmann, Calcutta, 1872, vol. 1, pp. 306–08.

[5] Illustrated in M. Zebrowski, *Deccani painting*, London, 1983, p. 27. The identification of the purpose of the drawing is strengthened by the fact that the earliest rules for the game of ganjifa were written at Ahmadnagar in the late 16th or early 17th century: see R. von Leyden, *Ganjifa: The playing cards of India: A general survey, with a*

13. Dashavatara ganjifa with original box. Nossam, Andhra Pradesh, late 19th century. Cards painted on paperboard; diameter 4.8 cm. Wooden box: 16.9 x 6 x 6 cm. Private collection. Photograph copyright J. Hopewell.

14. Card players. Illustrated folio of a palm-leaf manuscript of *Lavanyavati* by Upendra Bhanja. Orissa, late 18th or early 19th century. Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison (Gift of Mr and Mrs Earnest C. Watson, acc. no. 66.13.2). Photograph courtesy Chazen Museum of Art.

catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection, London, 1982, p. 42.

[6] R. von Leyden, "The Ganjafeh game and cards in Iran", *Journal of the Playing-card Society*, 9, no. 3 (February 1981), pp. 83–88.

[7] R. von Leyden, D. Duda, and M. Roschanzamir, *Spielkarten-bilder in persischen Lackmalerien der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, Vienna, 1981, p. 38.

[8] Described in von Leyden, *Ganjifa*, pp. 102–03, ill. pl. 9.

[9] For comparative material see J. Williams, *The two-headed deer: Illustrations of the Ramayana in Orissa*, Berkeley, 1996.

[10] Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar described many of the games in chapter 9, "Kautukanidhi", of his *Shritattvanidhi*. The late Dr Rudolf von Leyden held an excellent collection of these cards, now in the Deutsches Spielkarten-Museum (Leinfelden, Echterdingen) and described them, along with others, in his *Chad: The playing cards of Mysore (India)*, privately printed, 1973.

[11] Jeff Hopewell, "The playing-card workshops of Sawantwadi", *The Playing-card: Journal of the International Playing-card Society*, 24, no. 5 (March–April 1996), pp. 142–47.

[12] The most complete set of rules in English may be found in Michael Dummett's Appendix to von Leyden, *Ganjifa*, pp. 50–59.

[13] For more detailed information on *naqsh* see K. Gupta, "Gambling game of naqsh and ganjifa cards", *Journal of the Playing-card Society*, 8, no. 2 (November 1979), pp. 29–39, and Jeff Hopewell, "Naqsh in the nineteenth century", *The Playing-card: Journal of the International Playing-card Society*, 25, no. 3 (November–December 1996), pp. 117–18.

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R. von Leyden, 1977. *Indische Spielkarten*, Leinfelden-Echterdingen: Deutsches Spielkarten-Museum.

R. von Leyden, 1981. *Die Welt der indischen Spielkarten*, Vienna.

مهره مرکه در نجایه اندک خصل در کیج اندازند

نجایه نی کم دکاست بیاید انچه صد کنج جمع سده باشد کیرد دناری را سرد و اکر تفصیل زیاده آید مار کرد و دو بهر خانه که رسد
بار نوبت طاس رسد سرجه اید موافق ان بیاید دو بهر خانه رسد شش باشد و اکر نجانه اردها رسد در قید افتد و اکر نجانه حس رسد
سوخته کرد و دناری از سر ابتدا کند

کیج

خصل

کیج مهره مرکه در نجانه اید و حرف نجانه سیاه باشد و دو دو
حس نی دکرد و انها را صلاح میکند و دناری دکران سر بکیرد

سوخته کرد و دناری از سر ابتدا کند

سمار مهره مرکه در نجانه اید یک خصل در کیج اندازند

حس

مهره مرکه در نجانه اید حرف نجانه سیاه باشد و دو دو حس نی دکرد و انها را صلاح میکند و دناری دکران سر بکیرد

سوخته کرد و دناری از سر ابتدا کند

TREASURE

THE MUGHAL GAME OF GANJ

SIMON DIGBY

Among the illustrated material held by the former India Office Library, now part of the British Library, is the representation of a board of 8 x 8 squares with the rules and instructions in Persian for playing a game called ganj or "Treasure" (figures 1 and 2).[1] This is an appropriate name for a game in which the winner takes all the money or stakes that have been thrown by the players into the kitty. Although subsequently mounted in an album, the board measures 50.5 x 51 cm, a surface area just large enough for several players to play the game. But as the fragile surface of the paper with its delicate monochrome drawings would not have survived such usage, it may be considered a design for a playing board, for which the paper drawing would have been tinted, laid down on wood and varnished.[2]

Like a large portion of the Indian miniatures and illustrated manuscripts in the old India Office collections, the album containing this board illustration was purchased from Richard Johnson in 1807. Richard Johnson (1753–1807) had gone to India in the service of the East India Company in 1770. Through the following decade his service was almost exclusively in Calcutta, where he showed some acumen in private trade, acquiring wealth and investing in urban property. He mixed with the intellectual elite of Calcutta gathered around Warren Hastings, who were interested in exploring aspects of Indian culture. He also began to collect Indian paintings, with a particular interest in material illustrative of Indian life and customs. In March 1780, Richard Johnson had acquired from the "fount of honours" – the Mughal emperor Shah 'Alam II – the lofty titles of Mumtaz al-Daula, Mufakhkhar al-Mulk Husam Jang Bahadur. In 1782 Johnson was sent to Lucknow as Head Assistant to the East India Company's Resident at the court of the Nawab Asaf al-Daula. He remained there for two years and, during this time, had the opportunity to commission a considerable body of illustrative paintings. Many of them were from a single local atelier of artists. That this was a cooperative enterprise is known from the inscribed names on the individual paintings of a *Ragamala* series: Ghulam Raza, Gobind Singh, Udwat Singh, and Mohan Singh. It is likely that the minute sketches on the design for the game board are the work of a single painter from this group.[3]

1. Detail of the ganj board in figure 2a.

	7 Mountain		5 River		3 Horse		1 Talisman
9 Wilderness		33 Tavern		31 Gatekeeper		29 Gateway	
	35 Fire-temple		51 Palace		49 Pond		27 Fort
11 Forest		53 Tablet	**61–64** **TREASURE**			47 Garden	
	37 Minaret				59 Azhdaha		25 Moat
13 Sher		55 Jinn		57 Cave		45 Gardener	
	39 Mosque		41 Caravanserai		43 Hammam		23 Bridge
15 Simurgh		17 Elephant		19 Magic		21 Well	

2b. Schematic diagram of the ganj board in figure 2a.

languages (e.g. compare Dutch and German *gans*) may be merely misunderstood derivatives of the same word.

Richard Johnson's game of ganj

As shown in the drawing made for Richard Johnson at Lucknow in 1784 (figure 2), ganj was played upon a board of alternating squares, somewhat like those of a European chessboard. The "black" squares are blank, and each of the "white" squares (picture-squares) bears a drawing of a different spectacle or hazard that will confront the players when their throw of the dice causes their counter to land upon it. From square 1, the square of the Talisman, on the top right of the playing board, the path leads inwards in an anti-clockwise spiral to the Treasure. The four central squares of the board (61–64) have been consolidated into the enclosure of the Treasure (or "kitty").

The game as represented on the Lucknow board has a highly developed "real-life" theme. The players are conceived of as adventurers who have set out on a journey through a magical landscape, competing against one another to win a treasure. The spectacles and hazards that they encounter resemble in their visionary and magical quality those which the hero in the fantastic *dastan* or *qissa* narratives popular in Mughal India would have met, in their quest to win a great treasure or to perish in the attempt.[6]

The picture-squares, with captions in Persian, are as follows, from top right (figure 2b):

(1) *Tilism* – the Talisman: "From here the game begins." (3) *Asp* – the Horse. (5) *Darya* – the River. (7) *Koh* – the Mountain. (9) *Biyaban* – the Wilderness. (11) *Besha* – the Forest. (13) *Sher* – the Lion (or Tiger). (15) *Simurgh* – the Phoenix.[7] (17) *Fil* – the Elephant.[8] (19) *Jadu* – Magic.[9] (21) *Chah* – the Well. (23) *Pul* – the Bridge. (25) *Khandaq* – the Moat (or Ditch). (27) *Qil'ah* – the Fort. (29) *Darwaza* – the Gateway. (31) *Darban* – the Gatekeeper. (33) *Maykhana* – the Tavern. (35) *Atashkada* – the Fire-temple. (37) *Minar* – the Minaret. (39) *Masjid* – the Mosque. (41) *Saray* – the Caravanserai. (43) *Hammam* – the Hammam (hot bath). (45) *Baghban* – the Gardener. (47) *Bagh* – the Garden. (49) *Hawz* – the Pond. (51) *Qasr* – the Palace. (53) *Lawh* – the Tablet (Writing Board). (55) *Jinn* – the Jinn (Genie). (57) *Ghar* – the Cave. (59) *Azhdaha* – the Dragon. (61–64) *Ganj* – the Treasure.[10]

Though the pictures are small uncoloured drawings, they are executed with skill and sophistication and reveal the considerable range of the artist's repertory, from which he depicts a variety of figures and costumes, actual and mythical animals, architectural structures and landscapes.

The human figures

The soldierly figure bearing a sabre on the first square (Talisman) is in the position where the Fool or Venturer is found on the European "Goose" boards. The image is that of a new player on the Indian political board: his long-tailed coat of a European cut has a prominent vent designed for the coat-tails to lie on either flank of a horse (figure 3a). On the next picture square, the Venturer's Horse awaits him (figure 4a). The Irregular Cavalry of the Nawab of Oudh was trained and officered by Europeans seconded from the army of the East India Company.[11] The image may be seen as an equivocal allusion to the presence of Johnson and his like upon the Lucknow scene.

Other human figures include the syce before the Horse, a theme that anticipates the portraits of the Calcutta painter Shaikh Muhammad Amir of Karraya; a magician and perhaps his apprentice (figure 3b); women at the well (figure 3c); a *darban*

3a–f. Details of human figures:
(a) Venturer [Talisman] 1; (b) Magician 19; (c) Women at the Well 21; (d) Gatekeeper 31; (e) Wine-seller with drinkers 33; (f) Yogis at the Fire-temple 35.

4a–f. *Details of animals and birds*:
(a) Horse 3; (b) Elephant 17; (c) Blackbuck 11; (d) Tiger and tigress 13; (e) *Simurgh* 15; (f) *Azhdaha* 59.

(Gatekeeper) leaning on a massive stick (figure 3d); the wine-seller with drinkers (figure 3e), one swigging from a bottle; two Yogis at the Fire-temple (figure 3f); and a Jinn with horns (see figure 1). A number of the male figures wear a rounded turban with a smaller hemispherical projection towards the back of the head. This would seem to be a Lucknow Nawabi fashion.[12]

Animals and birds

Most of the animals are skilfully observed and drawn upon this minute scale, particularly the Horse (figure 4a) and the Elephant (figure 4b). The Forest is represented by a blackbuck(?) and two does (figure 4c), while *Sher* is illustrated by a striped tiger and tigress (figure 4d). The artist is evidently not familiar with the Persianate iconography of the *Simurgh* (mythical bird, or phoenix) and the *Azhdaha* (Dragon). The *Simurgh* is represented as a rather plump cockerel (figure 4e), while the *Azhdaha* has the head, horns, and spots of a giraffe (but not its long neck), thick paws, and a thick long tail (figure 4f).

Buildings and gardens

The Lucknow board provides realistic images of most of the classes of buildings of 18th-century Mughal architecture. There are contrasting depictions of the four major residential structures – the Fort, the Serai, the Palace, and the Garden (figures 5a–d).

The Fort is shown as a square structure with high blind walls and four gateways leading to a bare central enclosure. At each corner of the walls a bastion (*burj*) is surmounted by a domed *chhatri*. The Serai is a single-storey building. Its raised gateway is flanked by a row of chambers entered through arches opening on to the street. Its interior courtyard has rooms with large rectangular windows or entrances. The Palace has two double-storeyed projecting wings connected by a recessed front in the centre of which is the main entrance. There is living space on the flat roofs and a single penthouse *barsati*. The Garden is also a complete architectural scheme, divided by raised paths into geometrical parterres with large pavilions ahead and on each side. It recalls large 18th-century paintings of

garden scenes from Delhi and Lucknow and the earlier model of the geometrical parterres of flowers in the courts of Shah Jahan's Red Fort at Delhi.

The Bridge (figure 5e) is depicted with a roof above an arcade, while the Hammam (figure 5f) has a door and long windows which were probably covered with chik blinds, and a central roof pavilion which would have housed the chimney.

The arched Gateway (figure 5g) is curiously like an octagonal *burj*.[13] The Minaret (see figure 1) has diminishing storeys similar in profile to a Mughal *kos minar*. The Mosque (see figure 1) is of a more predictable type of the period with three onion domes. Two other main types of Muslim religious structure are absent, the domed mausoleum (*gumbad*) and the *imambara*. Likewise there is no place for the representation of a Hindu temple, for the game has only a square for the Zoroastrian Fire-temple (*Atashkada*), which finds a place in the imagery of the Persian poetic tradition. For this last the artist has no architectural image, but can only show flames in the foreground. However the two ascetics are distinctly Indian, for they are seated in *yogasana* and there is a gourd before them. The women stand with their large earthen *gharas* beside the well, while the drunkards loll upon the ground with a collection of bottles before the owner of the *Maykhana*, with the latter seated on his stool in front of a roof precariously supported by two poles (see figure 3).

Landscape scenes

The depictions of a river or lake set in a hilly or mountainous landscape show some relationship with the more elaborate and stylized landscape backgrounds of Lucknow paintings of the period. Developments in the rendering and perception of distant landscape views among the painters working in Lucknow in the second half of the 18th century included new formulae for the depiction of backgrounds of watery expanses bounded by rocky promontories and with distant hills and clouds on the horizon.[14] This type of landscape setting was copied from Italian prints of the period[15] and entered the repertory of the court painters of the Nawabs of Bengal at Murshidabad around 1750. These scenes accorded well with the actual landscape of Murshidabad. The customary background to depictions of Nawabs or British Nabobs seated on wide balustraded terraces became a vista of the great watery expanse of the river Ganga leading on to the far horizon and lines of cloud.

With the flight of the Nawab Mir Qasim from the British in Bengal to Oudh in 1763, his artists introduced the new landscape idiom to painters from other locations, notably those from the court of the emperor Muhammad Shah in Delhi, who by this time had settled in Faizabad and then moved on with the Nawab to his new capital of Lucknow. Among these refugee artists from the north and west we may note Mir Kalan Khan, possibly of Iranian origin, who had an evident preoccupation with the landscape of Kashmir.[16]

The landscape scenes on the ganj board all depict a broad expanse of water – lake or river – bounded by hills or rocky mountains:

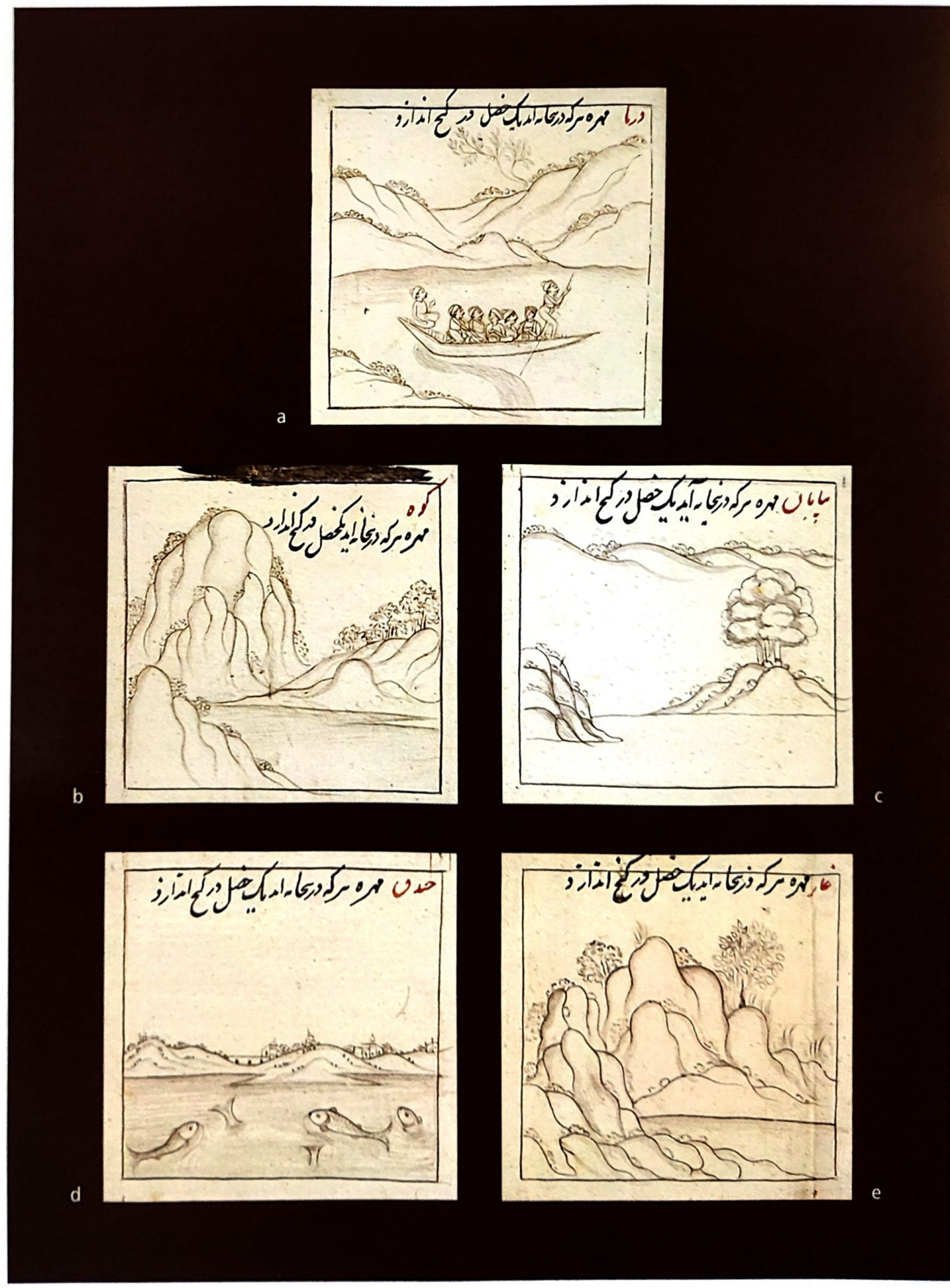
The River (5), (figure 6a): an expanse of water is shown, with rocky foreground to the left and high hills on the farther side. A heavily loaded flat-bottomed craft bears five turbaned male passengers and two boatmen fore and aft. At the bow the first is punting the craft, while the man at the stern is steering with a short paddle. The craft is evidently a ferryboat not a pleasure boat. The scene recalls the roofless shikaras still used to ferry passengers in a similar landscape in the Vale of Kashmir today.

The Mountain (7), (figure 6b): a river issues from a rocky defile. There is a massif of rock in the left foreground. Across the water there is an enormous crag to the left and a more gently sloping hill with trees at the summit.

The Wilderness (9), (figure 6c): one may note the change of meaning that has

overtaken the Persian word (*biyaban*), the literal sense of which would be a waterless desert. Across a flat space of water rise two rocky islets, one crowned by an immense tree. Beyond these, rising steeply from behind the lake is the spur of a mountain range of elevated skyline. Is it a coincidence that this vista recalls the view near Srinagar, looking across the Dal Lake past the man-made Suna Lank and Ropa Lank (known from its great trees as Char Chinar)?[17] Beyond these is the "mountainous amphitheatre" that backs the lake, "whose summit is 3,000 to 4,000 feet above the water".[18]

The Moat, or Ditch (25), (figure 6d): in this case, the resources of the artist have



6a–e. *Details of landscape scenes*:
(a) River 5; (b) Mountain 7; (c) Wilderness 9; (d) Moat or Ditch 25; (e) Cave 57.

not been able to match an image to the subject that was to be illustrated. The moat or ditch has been transformed into a vast lake, on the surface of which large fish leap and plunge. Beyond the lake on the low horizon there is a distant range of hills. The naturalism of the scene does not recall any area near the coastline of India, but perhaps rather – if we may pursue the Kashmir hypothesis – the surface of the Wular Lake, the largest freshwater lake in the subcontinent.

The Cave (57), (figure 6e): this composition recalls that of square 7 (the Mountain). But it is lightly sketched, devoid of details, as if the artist's powers of invention were flagging. There is a rocky mass in the left foreground, indicating a defile through which the river flows. Beyond the water on the left side there is a great rocky crag rising to a peak, above which are the profiles against the skyline of several trees of exaggerated size. It is not clear where the entrance of the cave is located.[19]

Can the resemblance of these landscape views on the picture-squares to the real landscape of Kashmir be more than coincidental? The names of some of the artists who worked in collaborative projects for Johnson – Mohan Singh, Udwat Singh, and Gobind Singh – suggest that they were incomers from the northwest.

Perhaps the closest parallel to these landscapes is to be found in the same Johnson Album. In it there is a small group of paintings thought to have been executed a few years earlier – in a variant of the new Oudh style – at Farrukhabad in 1760–70.[20] These paintings display a similar addition to the Murshidabad landscape formula that we find on the game board, of a range of craggy hills beyond the expanse of water, which in this case are depicted in bold and startling colours. As in the landscapes of the game board, there is an element of exotic fantasy that does not resemble any vista of the north Indian plains. The patron of these paintings was probably Ahmad Khan Bangash, and one may see in them a sentimental allusion to the distant homeland of his Pathan kinsmen in Roh (the Afghan hills).

Translation of the directions for play

On either side of the board, the instructions for playing the game are written out in Persian in accomplished Nasta'liq script. The language itself is of a somewhat colloquial Indo-Persian character, very much as it must have been spoken in courtly circles in Oudh at this period. (This occasionally gives rise to ambiguities that must be resolved if we attempt to play the game).

"The way to play the game called Ganj"

Each player is to take a different-coloured (or figured) marker. An advantage [of this game] is that unlike other games such as chess and backgammon and chaupar and ganjifa, any number of players can play this game, as many as ten or twenty, all those who are in the room.[21]

One player should first of all cast a pair of dice and start.[22] When the player lands on an empty square, no stake is taken from him.

If he lands on a picture square, he pays into the Treasure ("kitty") a stake of one unit of a value previously determined ("cowries, coppers, silver, or gold").

If a player lands on the square of the *Simurgh* / Phoenix (15), he pays a five-fold stake and advances to the square of the Fortress (27).

If a player lands upon the square of the Elephant (17), he also pays a five-fold stake and he advances to the square of the Gate (29).

If a player lands upon the square of the Magician (19), he falls into the prison of the Magician, and he cannot move again until another player lands upon the square of the Writing Tablet (53). This last player is then paid a two-fold stake by any player who is a prisoner of the Magician, and such players are free to enter the game again.

From the square of the Well (21) up to the square of the Tavern (33) there is a

single stake to pay when any player alights on a picture square. When a player lands on the square of the Tavern (33) he has to pay a double stake, and is carried back to the Magician's prison (19), from which he can only be released in the manner described above.

If a player lands on the square of the Fire-temple (35), he is burnt and starts again at the Talisman (1).

From the square of the Minaret (37) to that of the Writing Tablet (53), he pays a single stake on every picture-square.

If a player lands on the square of the Writing Tablet (53), no stake is taken from him. Instead he collects a two-fold stake from every player who is at that time in the prison of the Magician (19). Thereafter these players again enter the game, as described above.

If a player lands on the square of the Jinn (55), he is burnt, and must start again from the Talisman (1).

If a player lands on the square of the Dragon (59, guarding the entry to the Treasure), he falls into perpetual captivity for as long as the game continues. He is only freed if all the other players land upon the Dragon square and fall into captivity also. In this case the accumulated stakes remain in the Treasure, and the game begins again from the Talisman (1).

The game is won only when a player throws the exact number to enter the Treasure (61).[23] If the number thrown by the player exceeds this, he retreats backwards a corresponding number of squares.[24] He must continue to pay stakes, and he may also fall victim to perpetual imprisonment if he lands on the square of the Dragon (59); or to being sent back to the Talisman (1) if he lands on the square of the Jinn (55). Another player may now reach the enclosure of the Treasure and win its contents.

If the marker of a player lands upon a square on which that of another player is sitting, it displaces the marker of the other player, and transfers it to the square from which it has come. This is except in the cases of imprisonment (when both players remain captive on the same square).

"These are the rules of the game."

Muhammad A'zam's "Firangi Game"

By way of comparison with this unique Lucknow board for ganj, a summary account is given here of the earliest description of the game yet known, in a manuscript of the *Bayaz-i Khwushbu'i* ("Anthology/Notebook of Sweet Scents") of Muhammad A'zam,[25] transcribed in AH 1104/1698 CE.[26] While this manuscript's opening entry concerns scents and perfumes, much of the later contents are notes on the departments of the imperial Mughal court,[27] recalling the model of the *A'in-i Akbari* of Akbar's court historian Abu'l Fazl,[28] but referring to a time close to the transcription of the manuscript, i.e. when Aurangzeb and his entourage had been over a decade in the Deccan.

In a section of five small folios "on games", the first entry concerns the "European game" (*bazi-e firangi*),[29] for which two brief sets of rules are given. The game as inadequately described in this text is clearly a "sophistication" of an Indianized variety of the "European game". Such elaborations have a parallel to Akbar's personal embellishments on ganjifa and pachisi described in the *A'in-i Akbari*.[30] This prompts a possible explanation. The manuscript is for the most part a descriptive work on Mughal imperial practice and institutions modelled on the *A'in*, but is concerned with the current practice of the reign of Aurangzeb. It is unthinkable that the aged, pious, and determined emperor would have wasted his time on such a game, but could some other major figure at his court, who took the emperor Akbar as his model, have been secretly engaged in such a pursuit? Other copies of the work have not come to light. The scribe of the "Anthology of Sweet Scents" gives his name as Muhammad A'zam with no further identification. Could he be Sultan

Muhammad A'zam, third surviving son of Aurangzeb: pleasure-loving, in these years resident close to his father in the Deccan, and the princely contender who apparently had the greatest advantages on his side in the forthcoming War of Succession?[31] His liking for this game of contest would curiously anticipate his own end. His chances of winning the throne were good, but when the contest came nine years later he was killed in the battle with his elder brother Muhammad Mu'azzam (the emperor Bahadur Shah I) at Jajau in the outskirts of Agra.[32]

A number of uncertainties arise in attempting to reconstruct the Muhammad 'Azam playing board, but as I have argued in greater detail elsewhere, it appears to have comprised 169 (or 13 x 13) squares and to have included only 16 picture-squares, compared to the 30 of the Lucknow board of 1784. In my hypothetical reconstruction, the board configuration of the *bazi-e firangi*, as played by Mughal noblemen in the Deccan, would have followed something like the sequence of picture-squares listed below. (The corresponding, or equivalent, picture-squares[33] in the Lucknow board are given for comparison, demonstrating clearly the close link between the "Firangi game" and the game of ganj as played later at Lucknow.)

Picture-squares in the Muhammad A'zam board

14. *Darban* (Gatekeeper); [Lucknow: 1, Talisman]
27. *Fil* (Elephant); [Lucknow: 17, Elephant]
38. *Kalal* (Wine-seller), variant *Sharabkhana* (Tavern); [Lucknow: 33, Tavern]
49. *Pul* (Bridge); [Lucknow: 23, Bridge]
60. *Darya* (River); [Lucknow: 5, River]
75. *Sher* (Tiger); [Lucknow: 13, Sher]
82. *Kalavantni* (Singing girl); [lacking on the Lucknow board]
93. *Bandi-khana* (Prison); [Lucknow: 19, *Jadu* or Prison of the Magician]
104. *Asp* (Horse); [Lucknow: 3, Horse]
105. *Atash* (Fire); [Lucknow: 35, Fire-temple]
116. *Bagh* (Garden); [Lucknow: 47, Garden]
137. *Chah* (Well); [Lucknow: 21, Well]
149. *Badshah* (Emperor); [Lucknow: 53, Writing Tablet]
152. *Shaytan* (the Devil); [Lucknow: 55, Jinn]
162. *Darban* (another Gatekeeper) [Lucknow: 57, Cave]
164. *Azhdar* (Dragon); [Lucknow: 59, Dragon]
166–69. *Ganj* (the Treasure); [Lucknow: 61–64, Treasure].

As to the nature of the likely earlier Indian varieties of the game of ganj, possibly datable to the early part of the 17th century, there is no firm evidence at present. But my preliminary investigations suggest that these forms of the game may have shown the influence not only of the European "Game of Goose", but of an alternative Asiatic tradition, possibly emanating from Safavid Iran.[34]

NOTES

[1] Johnson Album 5:5; T. Falk and M. Archer, *Indian miniatures in the India Office Library*, London, 1981, cat. 361(iii), p. 187, illus. p. 467: it was the late Mildred Archer and Toby Falk who first aroused my interest in ganj, when they asked me to translate the rules of the game for their catalogue. In writing the present article (and its more fully developed version, to be published in the journal *South Asian Studies*, as cited in n. 5 below), I am indebted to many helpers, including Aditya Behl, Richard Blurton, Irving Finkel, A.H. Morton, Shahid Amin, Andrew Topsfield, and Bruce Wannell. I am also very grateful for the comments of Irving Finkel and Adrian Seville on an earlier draft of the article.

[2] Similarly two pages in the same set of drawings are *designs* for cards of ganjifa (Indian playing cards, of which the suits differ from those of European and West Asian packs), not the cards themselves: Falk and Archer, *Indian miniatures*, cat. 361(i–ii). Though the drawings could have been pasted down on boards for playing, it is unlikely that this was the intention of the patron Richard Johnson.

[3] Ibid., cat. 350, p. 170; cf. cat. 352, pp. 176–80.

[4] Ibid., cat. 361(i–ii, iv–v).

[5] See S. Digby, "*Ganj*: The game of treasure from Mughal India", in *South Asian Studies* (forthcoming), for a full discussion of these questions.

[6] For patterns of hero-cycles see Lord Raglan, *The Hero: a study in tradition, myth and drama*, London, 1936; B. Preciado Solis, *The Krsna cycle in the Puranas*, Delhi, 1984; S. Digby, *Wonder-tales of South Asia*, Jersey, 2000; F.W. Pritchett, *Marvelous encounters: folk romance in Urdu and Hindi*, New Delhi, 1985.

[7] This is an approximation to the character of the mythical bird.

[8] Referred to in the rules for the game as the "male elephant".

[9] For consistency with the other names I have substituted *Jadugar* (the Magician).

[10] An enclosure counting as a single square.

[11] For comparable images of European cavalry leaders in 18th-century India, see S. Digby and J.C. Harle, *Toy soldiers and ceremonial in Post-Mughal India*, Oxford, 1982, pls. 7, 11. The commandant of the Nawab's first regiment of Irregular Cavalry was Major Charles Marsac, who was also an architect and surveyor and a close associate of Colonel Polier. He was an illegitimate son of the House of Hanover, then the British ruling family. Marsac had resigned the Nawab's service in 1780 (and later that of the East India Company). At the date of the compilation of Richard Johnson's albums he was in the course of arranging his own return to Europe with a large fortune; see P.J. Marshall, *East Indian fortunes*, Oxford, 1976, p. 247.

[12] Such a turban is worn by John Wombwell, paymaster and auditor-general to the troops of the Nawab of Oudh, in a celebrated portrait attributed to Dip Chand around 1780: J.P. Losty, "Towards a new naturalism: Portraiture in Murshidabad and Awadh, 1750–1780", in B. Schmitz ed., *After the Great Mughals: Painting in Delhi and the regional courts in the 18th and 19th centuries*, Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2002, fig. 16.

[13] The composition, displaying a projecting octagonal covered bastion (*muthamman burj*) symmetrically set before a level wall, resembles that of "a Temple of Vishnu", in a series of religious scenes also commissioned by Johnson, attributed to the painter Sital Das: Falk and Archer, no. 354 (vi).

[14] For a penetrating analysis of this topic, see Losty, "Towards a new naturalism", pp. 34–55.

[15] Losty, fig. 9: landscape without figures, Murshidabad c. 1750. This depicts a river-bend around a rocky promontory with a walled fortress-like structure (a monastery?) and outsize trees; cf. Losty, fig. 16, the portrait of John Wombwell, with similar framed Italianate views on the wall behind the subject.

[16] Losty, fig. 15, which is an attempt, influenced by Brueghel, to create an idyllic scene of village-life in Kashmir. This is described as a *majlis-e Kashmir.* It is also catalogued by Falk and Archer, p. 137, no. 238, illus. p. 435. Realistic resemblance to anything visible in Kashmir is marred by the introduction of numerous large buildings derived from a European source. Losty concurs with Falk and Archer in dating this painting to Faizabad 1760, which is three years before the painters of Mir Qasim arrived in Oudh with their more naturalistic landscape idiom. Another painting attributed to Mir Kalan Khan, still working in 1770 (Losty, fig. 13), has a background of rolling hills with a more realistic resemblance to Kashmir, and also resembles the landscape sketches on Richard Johnson's game board. However Mir Kalan Khan, an innovator even in his old age, has in this painting discarded the stretch of calm water prescribed in the Murshidabad idiom. This late work of Mir Kalan Khan, with its awkward relationship between the large figures in the foreground and the hilly landscape, may also incorporate a reminiscence of Balchand's well-known painting of three sons of Shah Jahan riding in a hilly landscape that has been identified as Kashmir: I. Stchoukine, *La Peinture Indienne á l'Époque des Grands Moghols*, Paris, 1929, pl. XL.

[17] See G.M.D. Sufi, *Kashir, being a History of Kashmir*, Lahore, 1949, II, pp. 511, 534.

[18] F. Drew, *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories*, London 1875, p. 186.

[19] As I have argued elsewhere (Digby, forthcoming) the location of the Cave at this point near the Treasure/kitty seems to derive from the imagery on European boards, which have a second celebratory arch of victory marking the end of the course.

[20] Falk and Archer, pp. 189–91, nos. 365(i–viii), col. pl. 11.

[21] In practice, the game becomes difficult to play if there are more than four or five players who have

to sit around the board and cast the dice there. The space of the kitty also tends to be too small for a heap of counters or coins to be placed there. An upright open pot or vase can be placed upon it to hold the stakes. (It would also be possible to divide a larger group of players into four or five sides, as suggested by Irving Finkel.)

[22] The term used for the dice – *ka'batayn*, "twin cubes" (Arabic dual) – indicates a pair of cubic dice with faces bearing numbers from 1 to 6. This instruction about the opening of the game is not specific enough, but a viable procedure may be deduced from the difference between the legend and the image on this first square. The legend reads *Tilism*, "Talisman". Taken with the instruction above that "one player should cast dice and start", this suggests that the order of entry into the game may be achieved by throwing a lucky number (= talisman to effect entry). For a practical modern round of the game this could be decided by throwing a double 6. [This however is a Western mode of decision, not in evidence in South Asian environments. Drawing a long or a short straw, thread, or arrow is more common in Indian environments. There are also no instructions on the subsequent order of the entry of other players, which will have to be settled.] The successful entrant is now, like the image on the square, a *sipahi* (footsoldier) with a *talwar* (sabre) on his shoulder, and only when he passes the next picture-square (no. 3) will he get his horse and become a *sawar* (cavalryman). The order of entry of the players into the game should be decided by an agreed process – e.g. by clockwise or anti-clockwise turn or by casting of dice. Irving Finkel (personal communication) suggests that this method is a "Western idea" (not attested in Eastern playing of games). If one is to be purist about the Oriental character of the game one might use the short straw/stick or arrow, as in India!

[23] Though the Treasure occupies the space of four squares (61–64), for the calculation of the winning throw it counts as a single square.

[24] This is what is known as the "reverse overthrow" in discussions of European board games.

[25] H. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, Oxford, 1903, no. 2784, ff. 156–59. The opening *babs* are indeed concerned with perfumery.

[26] I am grateful to Aditya Behl for drawing my attention to the description in this manuscript and to Bruce Wannell for procuring photocopies of the relevant pages from the British Library.

[27] E.g. *Bab* 9, "On the contents of the [imperial] Camel-stables and the Elephant-stables"; *Bab* 10, "On the contents of the [imperial] *firrash-khana* and *tushak-khana* [carpet-store and wardrobe]"; *Bab* 11, "On the contents of the *Qur-khana* [armoury, weapon store]".

[28] Abu'l-Fazl, *A'in-i Akbari*, vol. I, tr. Blochmann, ed. Phillott, Calcutta, 1927. Cf. *Bab* 9.

[29] These two descriptions of the game are followed by some notations in cypher regarding chess, and a description of pigeon-flying.

[30] *A'in-i Akbari*, I, pp. 315–20; see also J. Hopewell, "*Ganjifa:* The traditional playing cards of India" in C. Mackenzie and I.L. Finkel, eds., *Asian games: The art of contest,* p. 241; and the same writer's article in the present volume. For a similar case of princely elaboration of games, see I.L. Finkel, "A Raja's Diversions: Board games at Mysore", in Mackenzie and Finkel, eds., pp. 126–33; also articles by Rangachar and Topsfield in the present volume.

[31] For the character of Muhammad A'zam and his father's restrictions upon him, see J. Sarkar, "Prince Muhammad Azam Shah", in *Studies in Aurangzib's reign,* 3rd ed. 1933, repr. 1989, pp. 61–81.

[32] For an anecdote of two Mughal commanders – one of them the founder of the dynasty of the Nizams of Hyderabad – consulting the Sufi Pir Baba Musafir as to whether Muhammad A'zam was going to be the winner in this War of Succession, see S. Digby, *Sufis and soldiers in Awrangzeb's Deccan*, Delhi, 2001, pp. 142–45. For a description of the battle of Jajau, in which Muhammad Mu'azzam and his talented son Bedar Bakht perished, see W. Irvine, *Later Mughals*, repr. New Delhi, 1971, vol. I, pp. 25–33.

[33] The variation in the correspondences between the respective picture-squares is described in detail in Digby (forthcoming).

[34] Ibid., for a fuller discussion.

SHEEP AGAINST TIGERS

INDIAN HUNT GAMES

I.L. Finkel

While the remote origins of board games will probably never be fully understood, more than one scholar has pointed out that the broad categories into which games can be readily divided reflect primary and timeless human activities. Thus chess, which in form and structure is commonly classified as a war game, represents in miniature the mortal struggle of human armies, while pachisi, the very essence of a race game, exemplifies the triumph of the "fastest", with a strong reliance on chance. In much the same way, the games covered in this chapter derive their existence from a real-life situation, and encapsulate the uneven struggle which has acted as the early backdrop to animal husbandry all over the world.[1]

In such games two players with *unequal* forces are pitched one against another, without the use of dice. One, or sometimes more, powerful animals (tigers, lions, elephants) are opposed by numerous weaker animals (goats, sheep, human soldiers). A formal but simple grid represents the playing surface. There are many versions of such grids, even within India itself, and a variety in numbers of pieces, starting positions, or other details, but all games of this class share the common principle that the powerful animals can "kill" or "take" the weaker, by jumping over them in a straight line to a vacant square beyond. The weaker pieces do not have this power, but, acting powerfully together, they are able to trap or hem in the stronger piece or pieces and render them immobile. Strong pieces win when there are too few of their opponents left to be able to entrap them, while immobilization by the weaker pieces brings them the satisfaction of winning. Whether first move in these games conveys an advantage, or whether one side, with equally skilled players, *should* win seems to remain uninvestigated, although one might suspect in general that the weaker pieces probably have the edge.

It might seem romantic to suggest that the first versions of such games were developed by shepherd boys who spent their lives guarding their flocks from predators, but we can be certain that the games' concept and nature derives directly from that universal and ageless activity. In India today, games of this kind are still very widespread. In villages and other non-urban contexts they have enjoyed a persistent life, while even in such great cities as Kolkata or Mumbai the board game historian with an observant eye will still encounter scratched boards on pavements, in doorways, or other suitable spots, including railway stations. Since time immemorial, opponents have turned to games of this type for the admirable reason known as "time-pass".

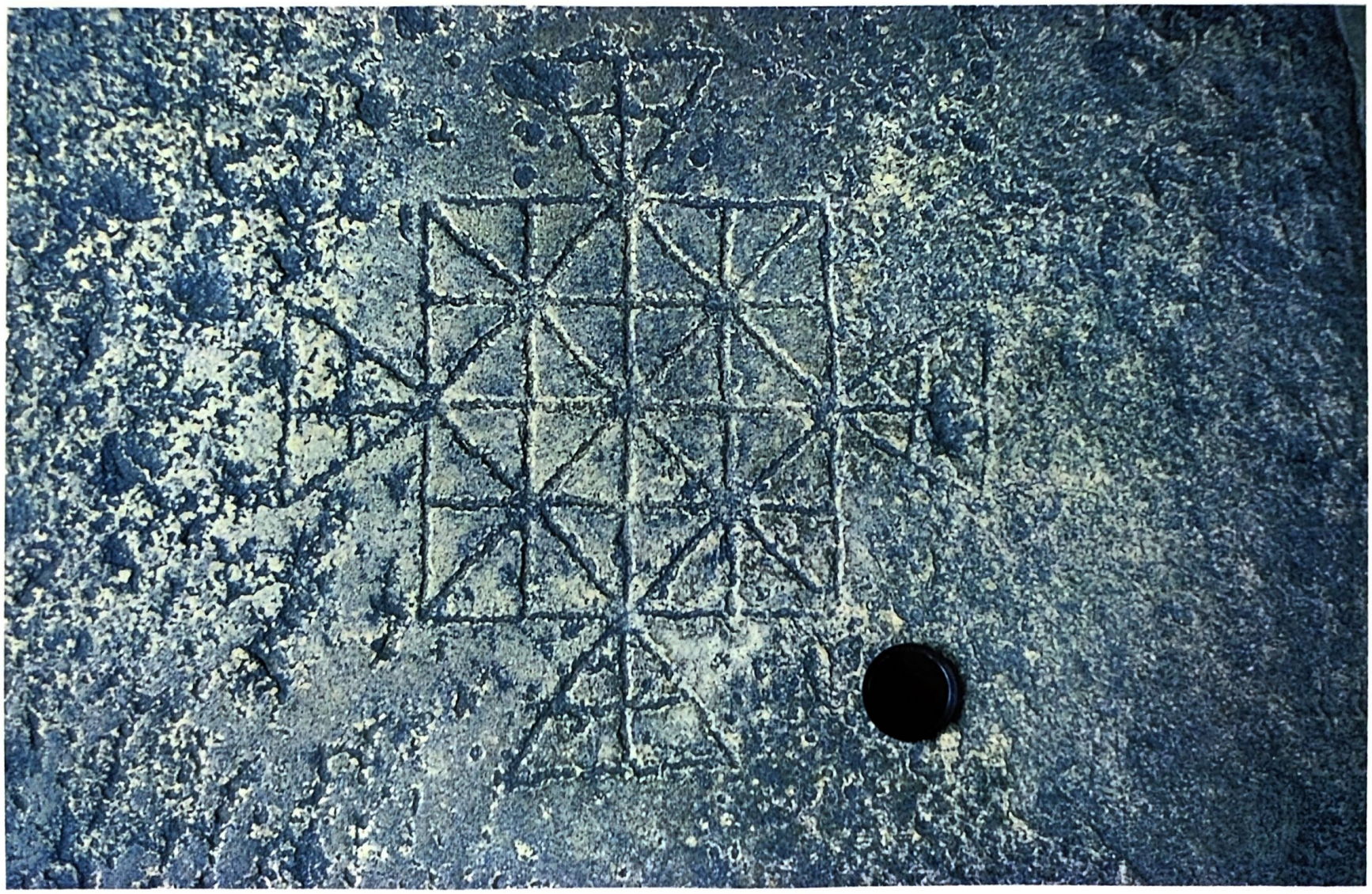
1. A bird's eye view of an eternal struggle: Boards 2, 3, 4, and 8 (pp. 126–27), with their various 20th-century pieces. Private collection.

The "board" for such games is not usually a board at all. The requisite grid is often produced on the spot by would-be players, who can mark it out on the ground with a stick, sketch it with a piece of chalk or stone, or scratch it into a pavement. Such improvised boards might only serve for a single occasion, but regular play in a particular locality will see more permanent boards in certain obvious places. As with other traditional board games they are particularly common where people have to wait, or can sit about in company in the shade. Many will be found in temple courtyards or at thresholds, as exemplified in figure 2.

The improvised nature of the boards applies equally to the playing pieces. Tigers and goats alike can be conveniently represented by pebbles, seeds, *kankar* (gravel), or other such items to hand. The only important point is that the two sides be readily distinguishable. This use of ephemeral equipment to play these games – and others – must have prevailed in India for unimaginable lengths of time.

Tracing the history of such games is, therefore, hardly possible. Providing anything like a plausible date for a graffiti-type "board" in a temple that has been in continuous use for 1,500 years is usually impossible. Once in a while there is a good clue, such as when an old dressed stone with a playing grid on top is re-used in some architectural phase in such a way that play is impossible, but documented cases of this kind are still rare.

Relatively little has been published about games of this type, inside or outside India. Pioneering fieldwork that did include such games was carried out by a handful of scholarly researchers in India in the early decades of the 20th century. Many of these papers were published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* and have now been conveniently reprinted by the Society in Kolkata, in a book edited by Nirbed Ray and



2. Stone-cut or graffiti board (type 1g), of unknown date, at the Jain site of Shravanabelgola, southern India. Photograph: T.R. Blurton.

Amitabha Ghosh, which may be recommended to anyone interested in the traditional sedentary games of India.[2] The first scientific treatment of games of this type was that of H.J.R. Murray, who devoted an entire chapter of his overview of the world's board games to what he called "hunt games", incorporating much of the previously published information pertaining to India. More recently, D. Parlett has offered a wide and helpful survey of the same range of evidence, under the chapter heading "Corner your Fauna", although preferring the term "chase" to "hunt".[3]

A long-term survey of traditional games that is being carried out by the Anthropological Survey of India at the instigation of the present writer has produced supplementary evidence as to games of this type as they have functioned towards the end of the 20th century. The following remarks, quoted from the forthcoming publication, sum up well the status of these games as the anthropologists encountered them:

> The winter season is generally a slack period for agricultural activities, and thus people have plenty of leisure time at their disposal. It was, however, noticed that the people preferred to spend their spare time mostly by playing cards, gossiping in tea stalls, watching television or listening to radio or tape recorder, and only rarely did they resort to their traditional *Bok bakri* and *Athara satiya* games. At the same time, it is also held by villagers that these board games – though less popular nowadays – have not yet become totally redundant in their recreational life. Many still play these board games especially during summer when extreme heat waves at noon prevent people from moving out or working in the field. In a situation like this, for having some instant fun *Bok bakri* and *Athara satiya* seem to be the ideal pastime for the villagers.

Systematic analysis of the information now available has allowed the establishing of a working typology of Indian gaming boards. For the present chapter, those board designs which are known to have been used for Indian "hunt" games are conveniently summarized by means of the following diagrams; their typology reference numbers have been included.

Not all of these boards are by any means well attested or widespread. Grid 1f is certainly that most commonly found, and

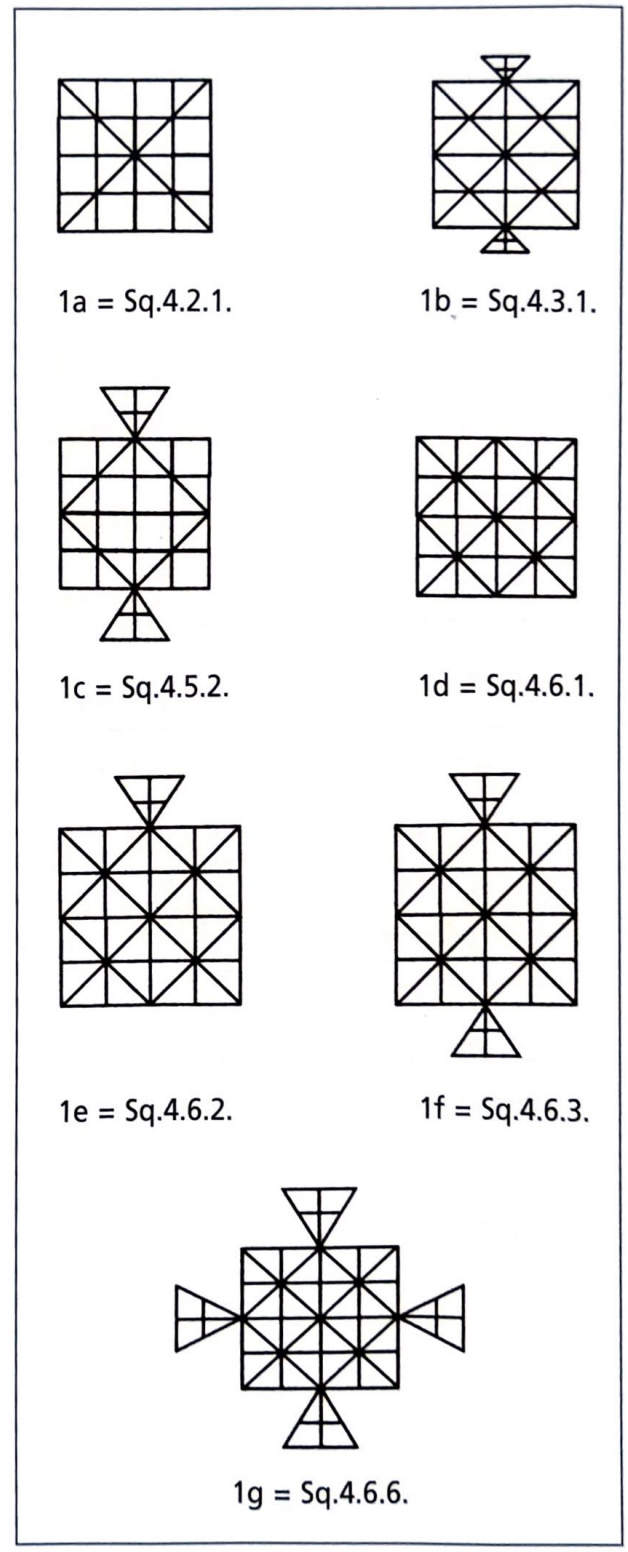


Diagram 1.
Boards for Indian hunt games based on a square.

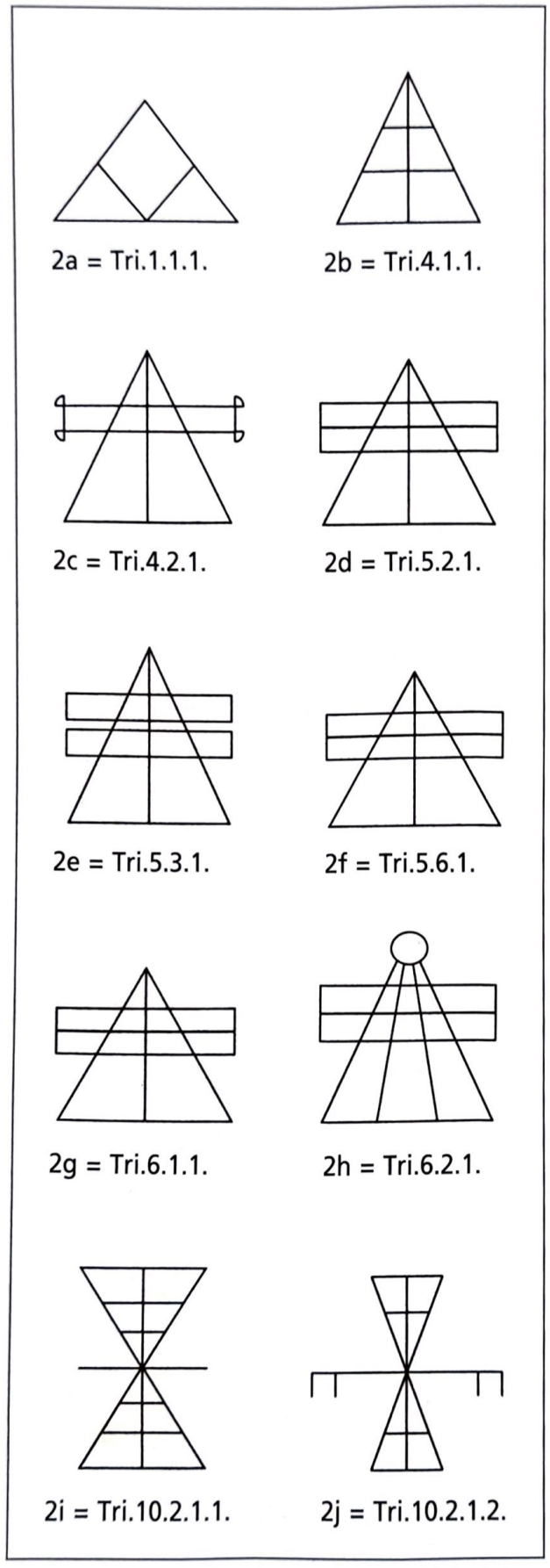


Diagram 2.
Boards for Indian hunt games based on a triangle.

can be classed as the "classic" type. In Orissa or Maharashtra, for example, under such names as bakri-bagh or bagh-bakri, the game is played with one tiger and sixteen goats. In Assam it has been recorded with two tigers and twenty men, while children in the Deccan in the 1830s were seen playing on the same board with three tigers and thirteen sheep.

With grid 1g, the most developed form, the 19th-century Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar of Mysore liked to play with four elephants and forty-eight soldiers, judging by a surviving palace ebony board in which a picture of each type, and the number of each required, was inlaid round the edge in ivory. In Kachch, the game of Vagh aur Bakeri has recently been recorded on this board with four tigers and twenty goats, the latter beginning in clusters of five.

The second family of playing grids is, in contrast, based on a triangle (diagram 2).

As will readily be seen, these two core types – the square and the triangle – can be elaborated in one of three ways:

1. Subdivision by internal rulings.
2. Reduplication of the core design.
3. Addition of playing areas in the form of "extramural" triangles (sometimes known as "bungalows") or other devices.

In contrast to the usual Mysore weakness for complexity in board games, figure 3 shows a small board from a painted Wodeyar compendium which is a specially-reduced version of grid 2b, played with three soldiers against one tiger.

There are other closely-related board variants which are clearly part of this pattern which are only *recorded* so far as being in use for different game types, such as three-in-a-row games or equal sides in a battle games, but it is very probable that hunt game variants have also been played on them. It is an interesting point that many Indian traditional board designs can be used for more than one game, often for completely unrelated games. A full documentation of board types and variants is still a long way off.

3. Soldiers fight a tiger, detail of a painted wood gaming board. Mysore, c. 1850. Private collection.

There is also a hunt game played in Darjeeling on a series of concentric circles with diameters, as shown in diagram 3. Here one player has a "large number" of goats, the other one tiger. Movement can be in all directions and not only along the straight lines, with the usual aim.

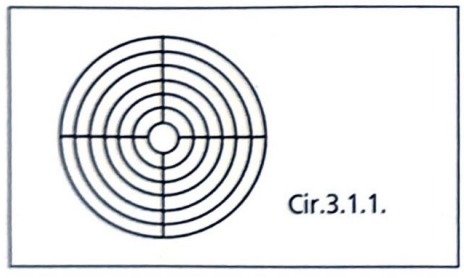


Diagram 3.
Board for an Indian hunt game based on a circle.

Among the traditional games of India, hunt games have always been considered humble and unsophisticated. In contrast with chess, pachisi, or even backgammon, they are not featured in paintings or other forms of art. Once in a while, however, an encyclopaedist who has taken up games as a topic has preserved some information, and this applies in the case of one hunt game (among one or two others known) that is played on a cross-cut board of 8 x 8 squares, as in diagram 4.

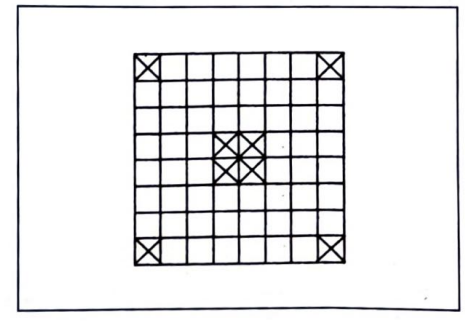


Diagram 4.
A hunt game can also be played on this square 8 x 8 board.

The *Kridakaushalyam*, a 19th-century treatise on chess and other board games, illustrates this 8 x 8 board with eight cross-cut squares, and discusses the game played on it called the Game of Four Tigers and Twenty-Eight Goats:[4]

> Now let us examine "The game of four tigers and twenty-eight goats". First, one should make a board with sixty-four squares by drawing nine vertical and as many horizontal lines. The four corners

and four squares in the centre are marked with "goose-foot" signs. Twenty-eight goats are placed in the peripheral rows at the four sides. Four tigers are positioned in the centre. Thus a game starts. If the square behind a goat is vacant, a tiger can hit this goat. In order to save his goats one should drive the four tigers into the four corners, where the tigers are blocked. A tiger can move in a straight line in the four directions as far as there are vacant squares. Goats move straight and crookedly by one square. There are four types of tigers' and goats' movements.

Names for games of this family proliferate, as may be expected, but the majority literally convey the local names of the "species" on the two sides.

While playing equipment, as has been stressed, is traditionally of the "cheap and cheerful" variety, there have been times when more permanent boards have been produced, and even lavish and beautiful sets are known, where what have traditionally been village games have passed somehow into family game boxes side by side with pachisi and other games. A private collection that has been made available for study to the present writer includes an unusual group of specially-made family sets of this type from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. These carved and decorated pieces must be something like 75 years old, accompanied by embroidered boards of much later date, probably replacements for old or worn boards. The game here is consistently between two strong versus seven weak pieces, and includes the following classes of opponents, as partly shown in figures 1 and 4:

1. Two *tigers* versus seven *goats:* all red-painted bone or ivory decorated with silver bell attachments; board of embroidered turquoise cotton with patterning; Chauhan Rajput, from Depakhera (Madhya Pradesh).

2. Two *tigers* versus seven *goats*; orange-painted bone tigers and green-painted bone sheep; silver bases and bell attachments; board of embroidered brown cotton with bead patterning; Chauhan Rajput, from Sanju near Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh).

4. Two ivory pieces from a Sheep against Tiger set: tiger (one of two in the set, Board 7) and red-stained sheep (one of seven). Rajasthan, probably 19th century. Private collection.

3. Two *devils* versus seven *men*; red-painted bone devils and red-and-green painted bone men; silver bases and bone attachments; board of embroidered turquoise cotton with patterning; Hara Rajput, from Jharale near Kota (Rajasthan).

4. Two *hooded cobras* versus seven *jackals*; blackish-painted bone cobras and dark-mauve painted bone jackals, all with inlaid red eyes; board of embroidered brown cotton; Rajput, from Rewa (Madhya Pradesh).

5. Two *dogs* against seven *cats*(?); painted bone heads on turned ivory bases which are probably recycled chessmen; Chauhan Rajput, from Kalupur near Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh).

6. Two *tigers* against seven *sheep*; tigers greenish-yellow painted ivory with silver knobs; sheep dark-red painted ivory; probably recycled pachisi pieces with heads added; Rajput, from Farangar (Madhya Pradesh).

7. Two *tigers* against seven *sheep*; tigers of green-stained ivory, with reddened teeth; glum sheep of red-stained ivory; with a recent fringed and embroidered board of turquoise cotton; from Rajasthan.

8. Two *inanimate* turned bone and metal pieces against seven *inanimate* recycled silver-topped pachisi pieces, which must be a typical example of a playing set made up from other family game pieces for a particular occasion or as a regular arrangement; from Rajasthan.

As was demonstrated in the works of Murray and Parlett, similar or closely similar hunt games to those documented in India have been widely if spasmodically recorded throughout Southeast Asia, while a broad look at board game history as a whole indicates corresponding "unequal-competitor" games from Europe, often called Fox and Geese, and recent research by Dr Mauricio Lima and colleagues has identified a game of this type among various indigenous Indian groups of Amazonian Brazil. The extent to which these boards and the games played on them can reflect in any way a common history remains to be investigated.

NOTES

[1] The connection between game boards, board games, and human activities and history has wide and scarcely pursued implications. Some discussion was given in Y. Averbakh, "Board games and real events", in A. de Voogt, ed., *New Approaches to board games research: Asian origins and future perspectives*, Leiden: Institute for Asian Studies, Working Papers 3, pp. 17–23.

[2] N. Ray and A. Ghosh, *Sedentary games of India*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1999.

[3] H.J.R. Murray, *A history of board games other than chess*, Oxford, 1952, pp. 98–112; D. Parlett, *The Oxford history of board games*, Oxford, 1999, pp. 185–97.

[4] This passage occurs in Harikrishna [son of Venkataram], *Kridakaushalyam*, Bombay, 1885, vol. 2, p. 127, lines 310–12 (English translation by Sergey Spassky, University of Cambridge).

THE FURNITURE OF PLAY

GAMES BOARDS AND BOXES IN INDIA

AMIN JAFFER

In his film *Shatranj ke khilari* (The Chess Players), adapted from Premchand's Hindi story, the renowned director Satyajit Ray employs chess as a medium for exploring the complex political dynamic between the Nawab of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah (r. 1847–56) and the East India Company. The poignant episode in which the poetic ruler surrenders his crown to superior British forces unfolds against a plot on a more human scale, that of two effete Lucknow noblemen, Mir and Mirza, repeatedly thwarted in their attempts to play chess. Oblivious to the impending collapse of Oudh, the two men think and speak of little else than the "game of kings", revealing that it originated in India and was only later taken up in the West. So strong is the spell of chess over the two men that they neglect all else, including their wives. Mirza's wife sees chess as a rival to her husband's affections. In a final desperate measure to recover his attention, she steals his chessmen, only to find that he replaces them with vegetables: a lime for a knight, tomato for a bishop, and chilli for a rook. Such flexibility is evident again when, during the invasion of Lucknow by East India Company forces, the two noblemen simply roll up their cloth chessboard and travel to a remote spot outside the city, where they attempt to play in peace.

As well as its more profound messages, *Shatranj ke khilari* conveys a sense of the portable nature of indoor games in South Asia. In India and much of the Islamic world, games were typically played not on hard boards, but on surfaces made of materials such as leather and cloth, which could be easily moved (figure 2). In this respect Indian games sets mirrored the traditional Indian approach to furniture in general, which was designed to be taken in and out of doors – or from room to room – as and when required.

1. Games box. Mysore, mid-19th century. Blackwood, inlaid with ivory, with lacquered brass mounts; 36 x 36 cm, height: 17.5 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum (I.S. 06409).

diplomatic gifts of the highest level. One such example is a reversible games board in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, which is embellished with later European eglomisé (gold leaf on glass) discs. One of these depicts the coat of arms of the Polish Count of Tenczin and bears the inscription "I.C.A.T.C.V." (Ioannes Comes A Tenczin Castellanus Voiniczensis) and date 1571.[11] The rare dating provides a terminus ante quem for the production of the board, a date supported by the existence of archival references to Indian mother-of-pearl games boards. For example, between 1577 and 1580 the Portuguese offered the Sultan of Morocco a number of Indian objects, including "two mother-of-pearl chessboards and draughts decorated in the corners with silver".[12] In 1572 Cardinal Francesco de Medici sent Albrecht V of Bavaria "*untavolere da giocare cosposta di madreperla al Indiana*" (a games table made of mother-of-pearl in the Indian style).[13] Indian mother-of-pearl games boards also appear in some number in the 1598 inventory of the ducal *Kunstkammer* of the Dukes of Bavaria.[14]

As a form of recreation, board games are often played while travelling, as a way of passing the time. This was especially so for Europeans in Asia, who sometimes spent their entire careers continually moving from post to post, or transiting between trading stations. Indeed, so characteristic were board games of Portuguese life in the East, that Japanese illustrations of these foreigners regularly depict them at play.[15] Given that the consumers of games boards made in India led transitory lives, it made sense that boards themselves should be multi-purpose and as compact as possible. Boards were typically designed for playing more than one

4a and b. Games board for chess, backgammon, and *barato*. Western India, 17th century. Padouk, veneered with rosewood, inlaid with ivory and ebony, the figure of solid ivory, carved. Private collection.

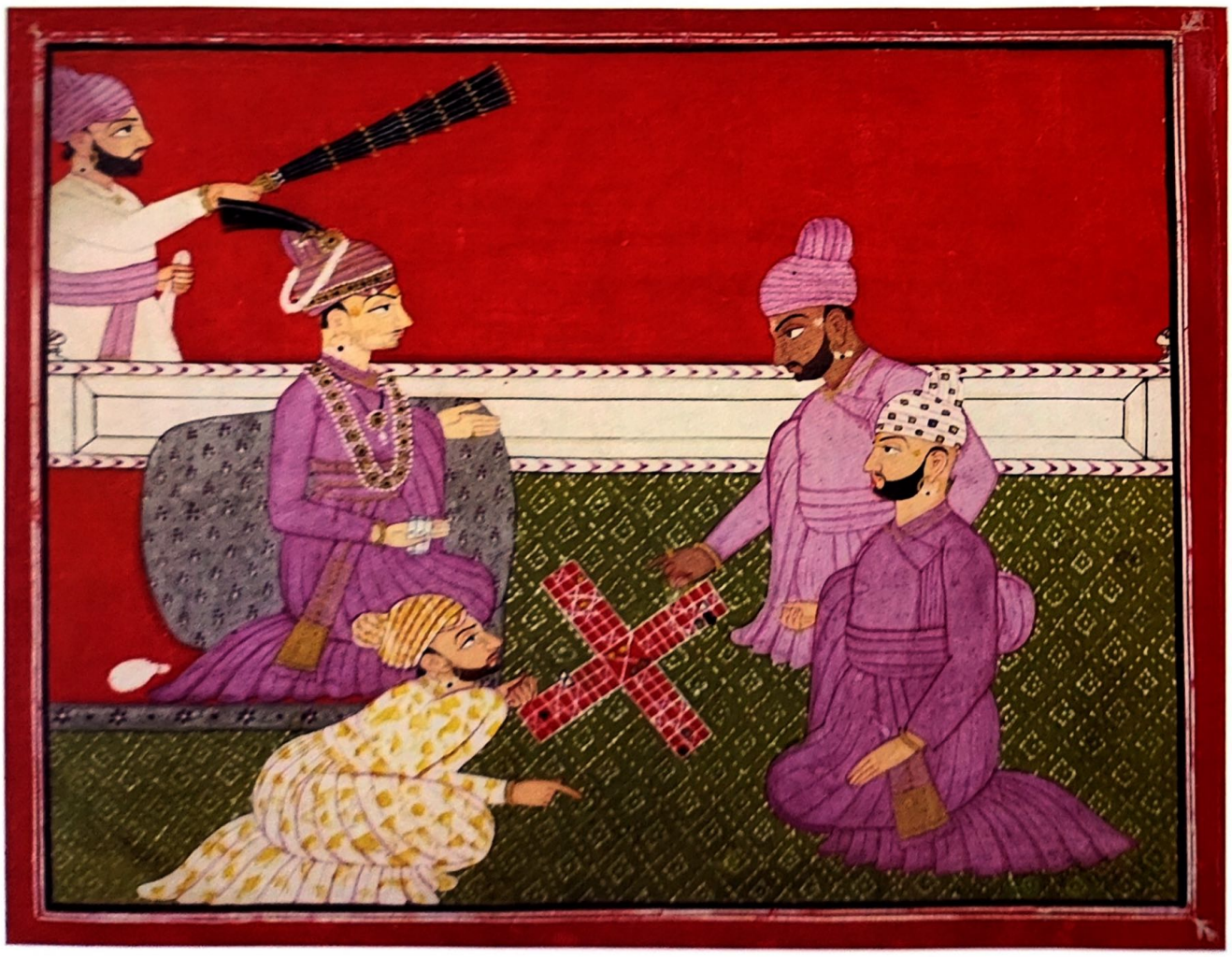
game and were often configured with compartments to store pieces and counters. An unusual group of boards with these characteristics was produced in western India under Portuguese patronage (figure 4). These pieces are celebrated not only for their distinctive form, but for their decoration of ivory and exotic woods inlaid with foliate designs, which related to inlaid designs on Indo-Portuguese furniture. This particular board was configured for playing chess, backgammon, and *barato*, a game whose rules are regrettably little understood today. The pieces fit into two lockable drawers under the board, whose distinctive jagged feet interlock, conveniently converting the piece into a box. In some boards from this group the central square is a trap door which conceals a pop-up figure.

The ingenuity of such pieces finds a parallel in a rosewood games box made for Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (r. 1799–1868), ruler of Mysore, which was acquired for the London India Museum's collections (now part of the Victoria and Albert Museum) at the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1867 (figure 1). The shape of the box – complete with recessed campaign-style handles – conforms to Western furniture of the early 19th century. The top is configured for four-sided chess and is finely inlaid with depictions of the pieces in each square.

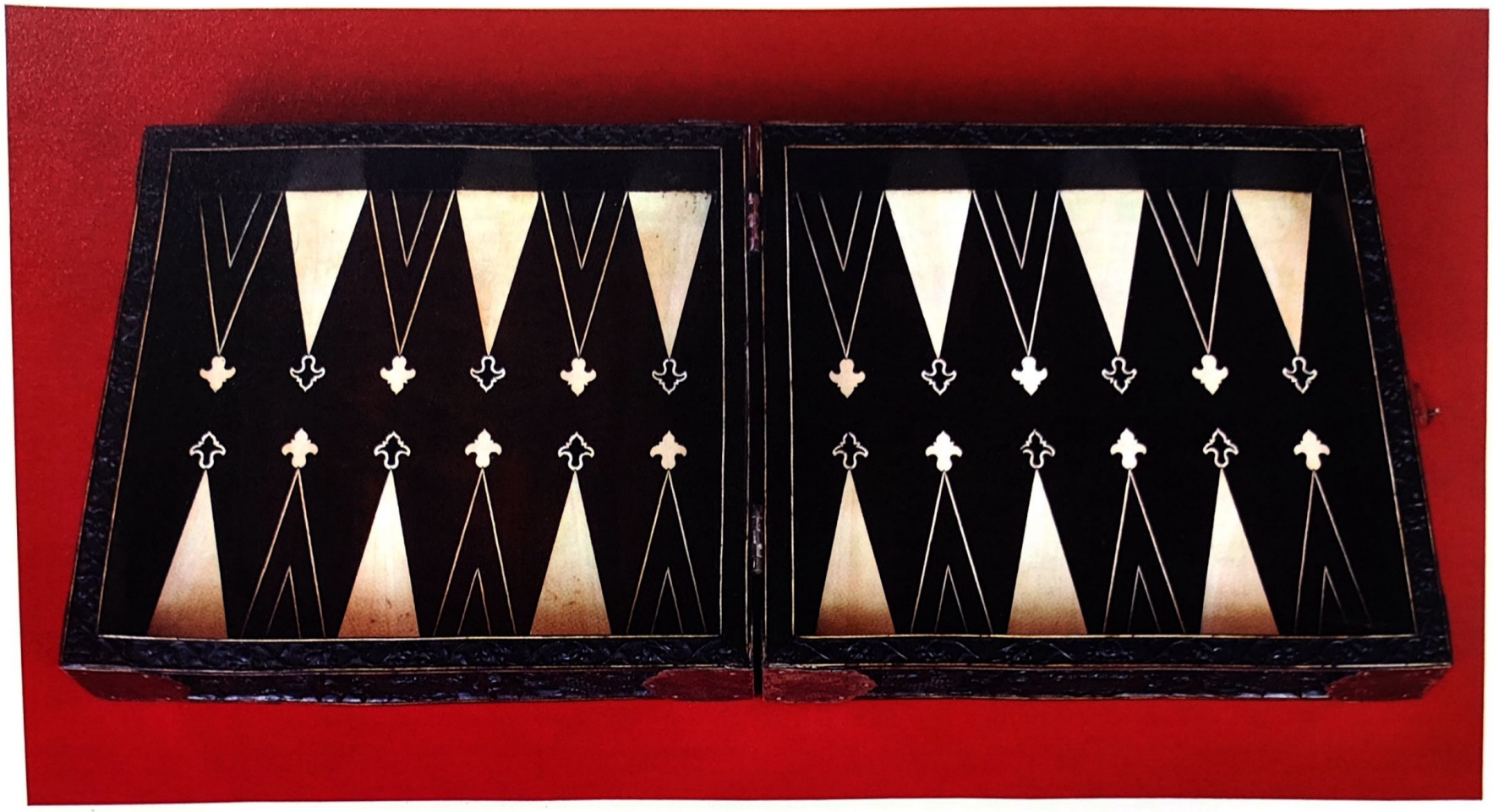
5. Games table. Travancore or Coorg, late 18th century. Teak, partly carved, and partly veneered with ivory; 45 x 45 cm, height: 36 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum (335-1907; Gift of Mrs F. Halse).

Unusually, the top surface is composed of four leaves that fold out to reveal three further tiers of playing surfaces, for a total of no less than eleven separate games.[16] All of the surfaces are articulated by borders and designs of inlaid ivory, a technique for which Mysore is renowned. The raja cultivated a deep interest in games of all kinds, commissioning scholarly illustrated works on the subject, developing more elaborate versions of existing games, and even inventing games of his own.[17] His fascination with strategy and board configuration inspired the production of a group of highly original boards in wood, of which the V&A box is a particularly sophisticated example.

An exceptionally fine games table in the Victoria and Albert Museum once belonged to Krishnaraja Wodeyar's contemporary, Lingaraja Wodeyar (r. 1811–20), ruler of the nearby kingdom of Coorg (figure 5). The families of both rulers had been displaced by Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan, and it is tempting to imagine that after Tipu's defeat in 1799, when peace was restored, the two kings played games together across such a board. Like Krishnaraja Wodeyar's box, this table owes something to Western furniture design. The cabriole legs are directly inspired by 18th-century English furniture, as are the acanthus leaves on the legs, which are incised in ivory rather than carved in wood, as would have been the case on a European piece. Incising ivory and highlighting it with lac is characteristic of southern India. However, the decoration of this table is unusually restrained, differing vastly from traditional incised ivory work of the region, which is usually richly ornamented with designs of foliage and mythic beasts. Also unusual is the height of the table. In India, board games were traditionally played at ground level, the board itself placed on the floor or on a very low table (figure 6). With growing European influence in the subcontinent in the 18th century, local elites sometimes adopted the Western custom of elevated furniture, sitting on chairs and using tables for dining and writing. The



6. Chaupar players. Kulu, Punjab Hills, c. 1775–80. Opaque watercolour on paper; 20 x 26.3 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum (I.S. 123-1954).



7a

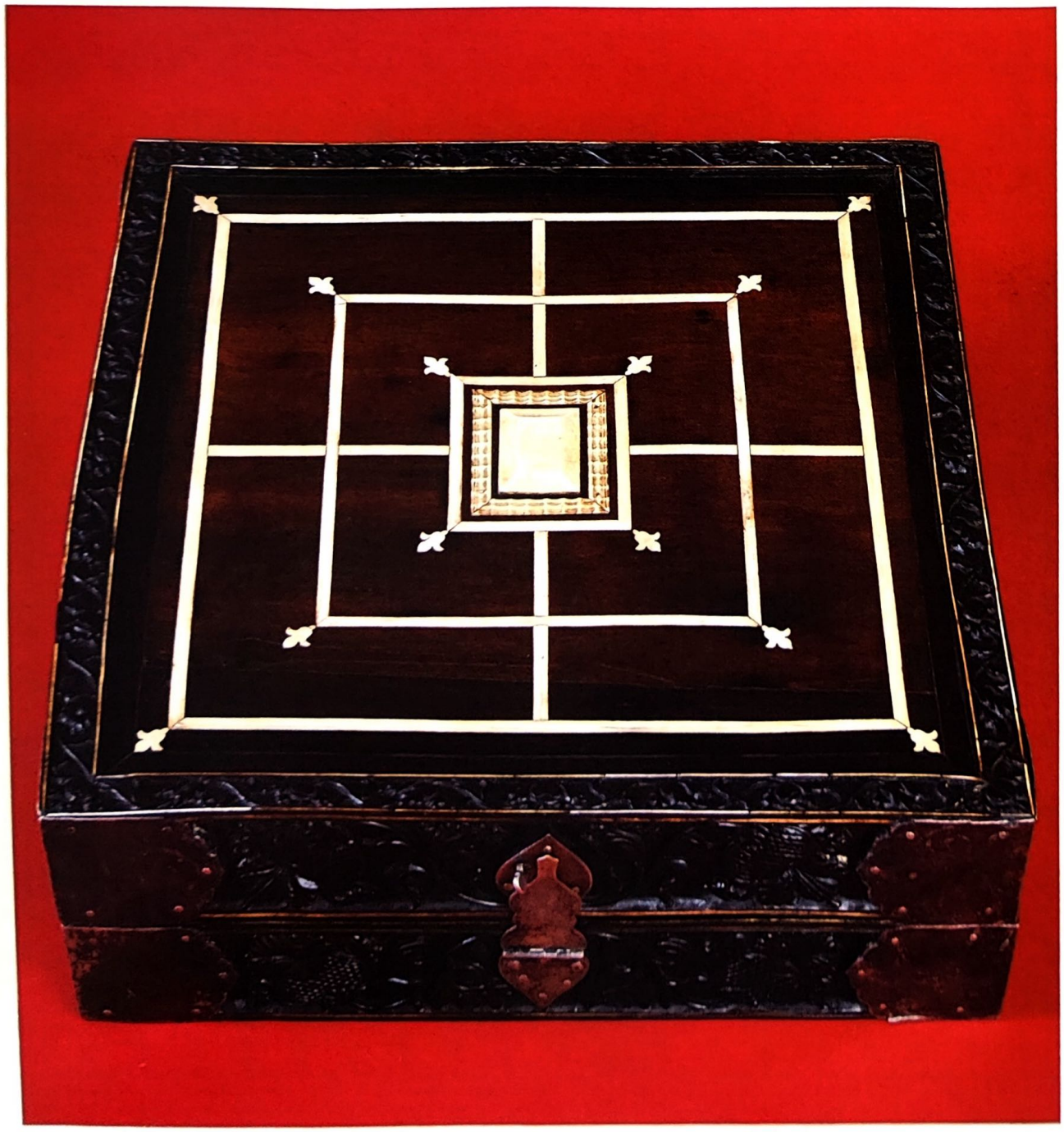
height of this table is ambiguous; it is too low to be used while on a Western-style chair, but too high to use while seated on the ground. The ruler and his opponent must have used low seats to play this game.

Lingaraja's board is accompanied by its original pieces, of turned and incised ivory, one team stained black and the other red. Ivory has long been used in India for the production of gaming pieces. On his travels in India, the 10th-century Baghdadi observer, al-Masudi (d. 956?) noted that "By far the most frequent use of ivory is for the manufacture of men for chess and *nard* [backgammon]."[18] In pre-European India both abstract and figurative chess pieces were used. The former appear to have been more commonplace, and have certainly survived in greater numbers. In sets of both abstract and figurative chessmen the two competing sides were typically differentiated by their colour. An example of this may be found in the group of 17th-century Indian chessmen in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden (Inv. No. Y355), which is divided into a red and a white side, both embellished with gold paint.

Chairs and tables are essential tools for Western living and were amongst the first requirements of Europeans settling in India. However, as the Portuguese discovered when they reached the subcontinent in the late 15th century, there was no local furniture that suited their lifestyle. This was because, at the time that Europeans arrived in India in the late 15th century, people principally sat cross-legged on textiles placed on the floor, and this posture, in which they socialized and ate, determined their needs and the design of the objects that surrounded them. The pressing demand for furniture among Europeans in the subcontinent inspired them to commission pieces from native carpenters, giving rise to schools of cabinet-making which crafted furniture for the use of Europeans locally, or for export to Europe. A particularly important school of export furniture developed along the Coromandel Coast, a centre of textile production where ebony and ivory were both available in quantity. According to the late 17th-century traveller Thomas Bowrey, the leading port on that coast, Masulipatam (Machilipatnam),

"affordeth also Chaires and tables of that admirable wood Ebony; Chests of draweres, Screetores finely wrought, inlaid with turtle Shell or ivory for which a very great trafficke is driven in most parts of India, Persia, Arabia, China and the South Seas as well as into England and Holland".[19] While large-scale pieces of Coromandel Coast furniture and boxes have survived in quantity, the opposite is true for games boards. A rare surviving example, configured on the exterior surfaces for chess and Nine Men's Morris, and on the interior for backgammon, provides an idea of why such pieces were so sought after internationally (figure 7). The ivory squares contrast beautifully with the ebony, which is carved with bold flowers

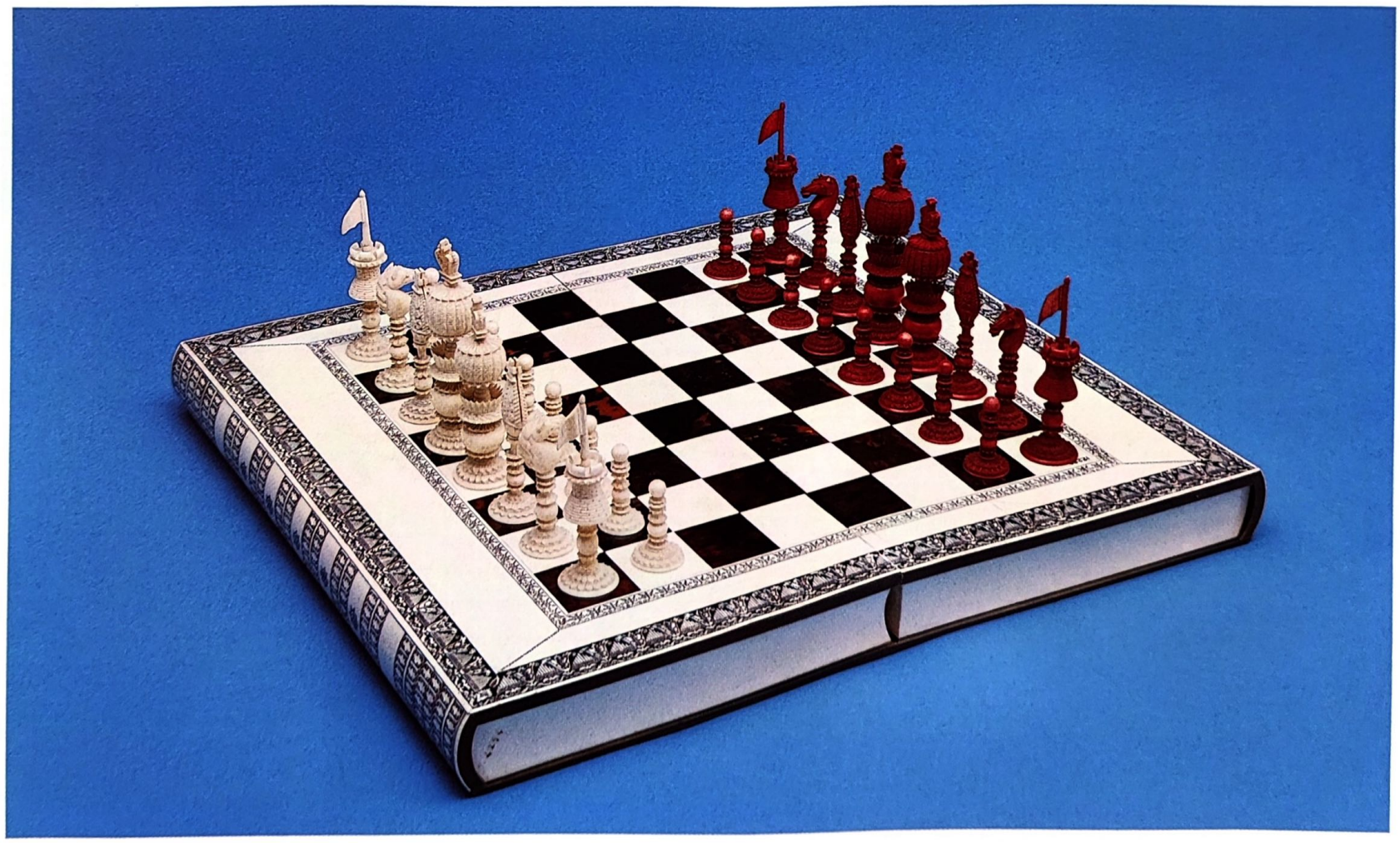
7b



7a–c. Games box for chess, Nine Men's Morris, and backgammon. Coromandel Coast, late 17th century. Ebony, carved and partly inlaid with ivory, with metal mounts. 47.5 x 47.5 cm; height: 14.5 cm. Private collection.

such as were highly fashionable on Coast textiles of the period.

Games boards and games boxes were stock products of furniture-making workshops at Vizagapatam (Vishakhapatnam), a port further down the Coast which was blessed with a fine harbour and a textile-producing hinterland, both of which attracted European settlement. The port was frequented by European vessels travelling between Europe and East Asia, as well as smaller native craft trading along the Coast, both of which provided a convenient and reliable method of exporting furniture to foreign markets.[20] The earliest Vishakhapatnam manufactures can be dated on stylistic grounds to the beginning of the 18th century, although the first references to the industry date to the 1750s, when Major John Corneille wrote of Vishakhapatnam that its "chintz is esteemed the best in India for the brightness of its colours", and that "The place is likewise remarkable for its inlay work, and justly, for they do it to the greatest perfection."[21] The earliest Vishakhapatnam work was characterized by the inlay of ivory into wood, most often in intricate foliate designs and bold floral patterns drawn from textiles. From the mid-18th century onwards craftsmen started veneering wood with ivory, with decoration incised and highlighted with lac. While some Vishakhapatnam games boards and boxes that are inlaid with ivory exist, the vast majority of surviving examples are of wood veneered with ivory (figure 8). Typically these are configured on the outside for chess and on the inside for backgammon, the exterior with contrasting tortoiseshell or horn and the interior of wood (usually sandalwood), with contrasting fields in ivory and ebony. Games boxes of this variety were also sometimes fitted with matching ivory-veneered boxes to contain the assorted pieces. As in the example shown here, the exterior of some Vishakhapatnam boxes were moulded, so that when closed, they resembled a pair of books. It is well known that Vishakhapatnam boards were prized in India and England, but evidence exists that



8. Folding games board: chess set. Vishakhapatnam, late 18th century. Wood, veneered with ivory, and partly covered with tortoiseshell; 46.5 x 27 cm, height: 10 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum (I.S. 02288).

The box is of rosewood, veneered with sandalwood, and inlaid with ebony, ivory, and *sadeli* work. The lid is configured for three games: cribbage, chess, and Fox and Geese. Were that not enough, the box unfolds to reveal a velvet-lined writing surface, which conceals a storage space for papers and games pieces. Although made in British India in the mid-19th century, the ingenuity of the design and the high-quality workmanship recalls the cleverly conceived folding games boxes made in Gujarat for Portuguese patrons two centuries earlier. Both pieces reveal that although their own culture of game-playing was more firmly rooted in textiles, Indians and Indian craftsmen excelled equally in the creation, development, and use of Western-style gaming furniture.

NOTES

[1] M. Mark, *Antique Indian chess sets*, Niedernhausen, 1997–98, p. 28; C. Mackenzie and I.L. Finkel, eds., *Asian games: The art of contest*, New York, 2004, p. 148.

[2] *The book of Duarte Barbosa*, tr. M.L. Dames, I, London, 1918, p. 142.

[3] *The voyage of John Huyghen Van Linschoten to the East Indies*, I, London, 1885, p. 61.

[4] *Jahangir's India, The remonstratie of Francisco Pelsaert*, tr. W.H. Moreland and P. Geyl, Cambridge, 1925, p. 32.

[5] A closely related example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is catalogued as Italian, early 16th century (Pfeiffer Fund, 1962; 62.14).

[6] For examples of 19th-century *sadeli* games boards made in India, see A. Jaffer, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon*, London: V&A, 2001, pp. 234, 322.

[7] For a 16th-century Italian chess and backgammon board executed with a similar technique, see V&A 7849-1861.

[8] G. Correa, *Lendas da India*, I, Lisbon, 1858, p. 287; *The three voyages of Vasco da Gama* (London, 1869), quoted in S. Digby, "The mother-of-pearl overlaid furniture of Gujarat: the holdings of the Victoria and Albert Museum", *Facets of Indian art*, eds. R. Skelton et al., London, 1986, p. 215.

[9] *The heritage of Raulunchantim*, Lisbon: Museu de São Roque, 1996, pp. 137–38.

[10] *The voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten*, p. 136.

[11] *Exotica: The Portuguese discoveries and the Renaissance Kunstkammer*, Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, 2001, p. 114.

[12] *The heritage of Raulunchantim*, pp. 137–38.

[13] *Exotica*, p. 116.

[14] *Exotica*, pp. 115–16.

[15] See, for example, a six-panel screen depicting the arrival of a Portuguese ship to a Japanese port, Japan, 1630s, illustrated in *Encounters: the meeting of Asia and Europe, 1500–1800*, eds. A. Jackson and A. Jaffer, London: V&A, 2004, fig. 16.1.

[16] For a full analysis of this piece see Jaffer, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon*, pp. 161–64.

[17] On this subject see also I.L. Finkel, "A Raja's diversions", in Mackenzie and Finkel, eds., *Asian games*, pp. 126–33, and the articles by Vasantha Rangachar and Andrew Topsfield in the present volume, with discussion of further examples of Krishnaraja's commissions of rosewood games boards, brass plates inscribed with board designs, and wall-paintings of boards in the Jaganmohana Palace (now the Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery) at Mysore.

[18] Quoted in Mark, *Antique Indian chess sets*, p. 15.

[19] Thomas Bowrey, *Geographical account of countries around the Bay of Bengal [1669–1679]*, London, [1905], p. 71.

[20] W. Hamilton, *A geographical, statistical, and historical description of Hindostan and the adjacent countries*, II, London, n.d. [c. 1820], p. 62.

[21] Major J. Corneille, *Journal of my service in India*, ed. M. Edwardes, London, 1966, pp. 100–01.

[22] Fanny Parks, *Wanderings of a pilgrim in search of the picturesque*, London, 1850, II, p. 99.

[23] *Miss Fane in India*, repr. Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, 1989, p. 118.

GAMES AND PUZZLES OF MAHARAJA KRISHNARAJA WODEYAR OF MYSORE

"BROADCAST THEM TO THE WORLD"

VASANTHA RANGACHAR

Krishnaraja Wodeyar and his contribution to board games

For anyone interested in the traditional board games of India, the name of Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III of Mysore (1794–1868) will always be held in respect and admiration. A member of the Wodeyar dynasty which had ruled the kingdom almost uninterruptedly since the 16th century, the five-year-old Krishnaraja had been restored to the throne by the British in 1799. Poets, scholars, musicians, and astrologers adorned his court, and he himself was a man of high cultural refinement, with a pleasant and dignified appearance. Fluent in many languages, he was both a religious philosopher and a very able mathematician.

A skilful player at board and card games, the Raja also possessed a keen interest in the games of the country, prompting him to collect information and preserve it in lengthy, illustrated encyclopaedic works. In addition, he was responsible for the development of many new and complex games or elaborations of older games. Details of all these achievements are recorded in his court manuscripts, which played a central role in the Raja's programme of documentation and dissemination of his games creations: for he wished, in his own words, to "broadcast them to the world".[1] Numerous, closely related examples of Krishnaraja's board game creations are also documented in the original mural paintings, inscribed brass plates, and game boards and pieces still preserved at Mysore in the Shri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, formerly the royal Jaganmohana Palace dating from 1861. The board game historian is thus presented with a unique and abundant range of surviving material for study. Little attention has yet been paid to this remarkable intellectual and artistic legacy,[2] partly because of the complexity of much of the material.

1. Manuscript page with cryptographic knight's tour diagrams in the form of a *hamsa* (sacred goose) and peacock. From the *Chaturangada Bannada Mane*, in Sanskrit language and Kannada script. Mysore, mid-19th century. Ink and watercolour on paper; 18 x 24 cm. Institute of Kannada Studies, Mysore.

The Raja's writings on games

A surviving group of mid-19th-century Mysore court manuscripts on board games forms the most informative source of all. These encyclopaedic compilations, written in Sanskrit and Kannada and copiously illustrated, remain virtually unpublished.

Six manuscripts are now in private collections: the compendious *Chaturanga Sarasarvasvam* of 666 pages;[3] *Shri Krishnaraja Chaturanga Sudhakarah* of 118 pages; *Kempu Kitabu* ("Red Book") of 98 pages; *Samkhya Shastra* (concerning numerology used for play) of 65 pages; *Chaturanga Chamatkrita Chakramanjari* of 248 pages, and an abridged, coloured lithograph edition of the same text in six languages (Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Sanskrit, Persian) written in 1858; also various loose sheets depicting puzzles. Three manuscripts are in public collections: the *Chaturanga Sudhakarah* of 16 pages, in the British Library, London;[4] *Kautuka Nidhi* (eighth chapter of the encyclopaedic *Shri-tattvanidhi*) of 46 pages, in the Oriental Library, Mysore; and the *Chaturangada Bannada Mane* of 156 pages, in the Institute of Kannada Studies Library, Mysore.

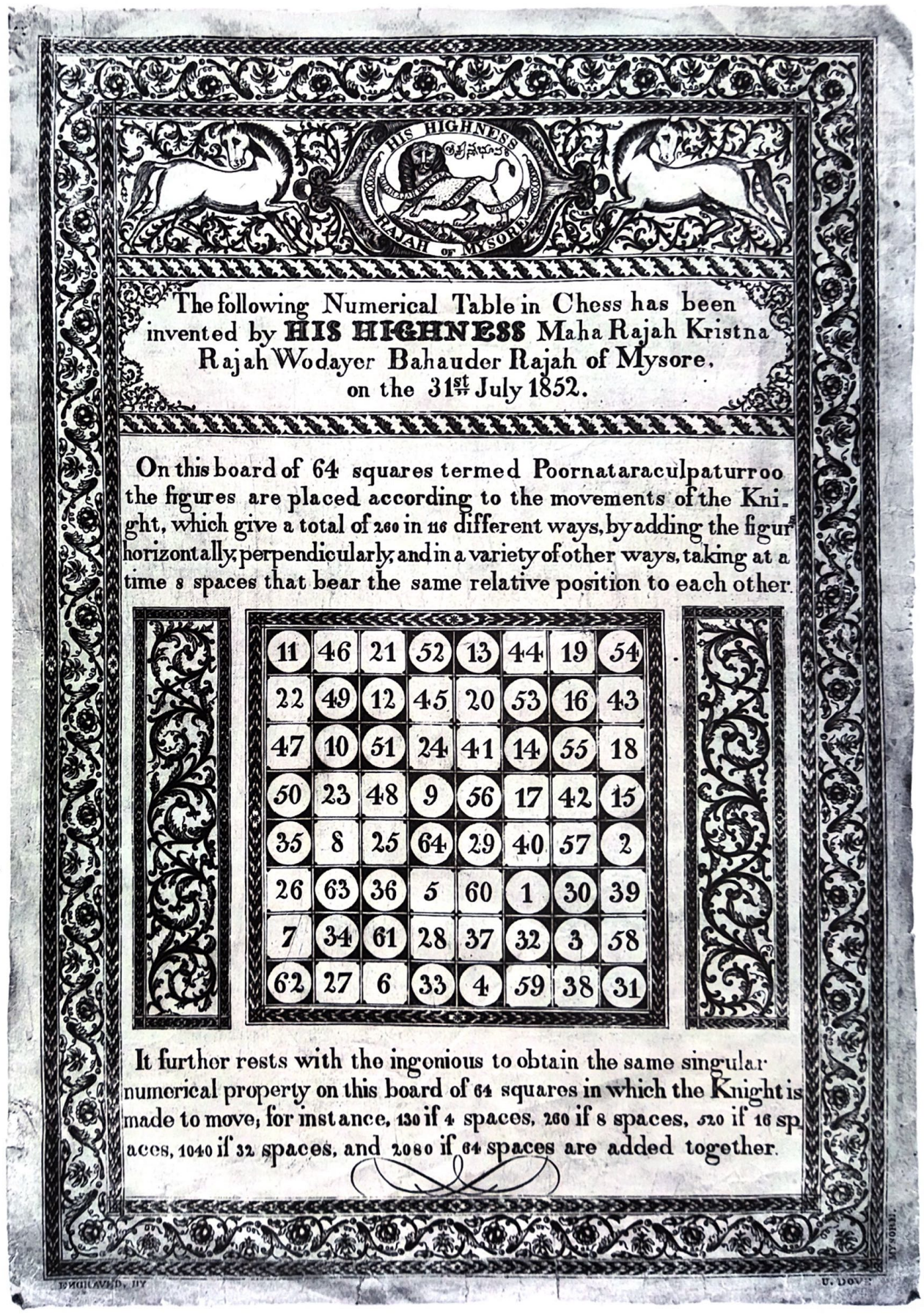
2. Manuscript page with cryptographic puzzle in the form of a Shivalingam. Mysore, mid-19th century. Ink on paper; 18 x 24 cm. Institute of Kannada Studies, Mysore.

The pages of these games-related manuscripts usually contain painted illustrations of each game board described, often showing the necessary pieces, with a note of the number of pieces required. The accompanying Sanskrit and Kannada texts are of varying length and include rules of play and other observations. It appears that certain shorter manuscripts represent digests of the larger works, but the relationship between these manuscripts, as well as the full extent of this unparalleled textual inheritance, remain to be worked out in detail.

Mathematical puzzles are another recurrent theme of these manuscripts, especially the knight's tour,[5] a classic mathematical puzzle of which the Raja invented many variants, in some cases combined with religious pictorial imagery or symbolism. A typical page from the *Chaturangada Bannada Mane* contains diagrammatic images of a *hamsa* (sacred goose) and peacock (figure 1), formed by cryptographic[6] knight's tours, in which each number within the figure represents a word, and the word in turn represents a letter. Another such puzzle, in the form of a lingam (figure 2), follows a similar method. Each number stands for a word, and to solve the puzzle one needs to know the relevant poetic text, found in one of the royal manuscripts, to recognize the letter patterns of the words. The Raja's knowledge of encoding and decoding practice is perhaps used here with an esoteric religious significance. The numbers displayed in the squares are generated according to the text of the *Shivastottarastotram* (found in manuscript form at Mysore), so forming the auspicious pattern of a Shivalingam, each word in the relevant line of text

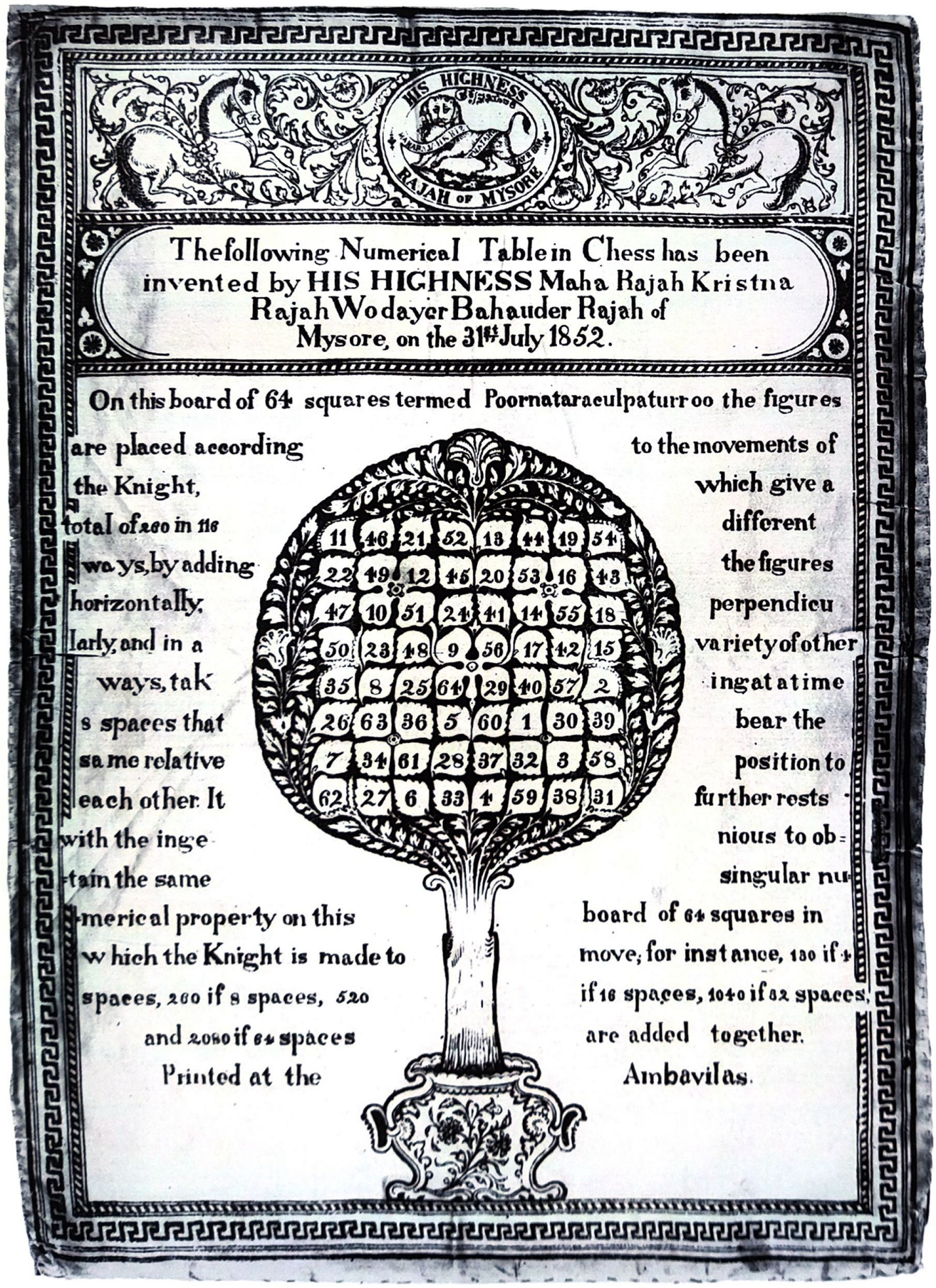
distributed to his friends; many of these were extremely ingenious."[7]

It is not known how many of these printed cloths, if any, survive in India. In 1982 a group of seven in good condition, also with one example on paper, came to light in a British private collection.[8] Two have texts in English (figures 4 and 5) and bear printer's inscriptions. One states that it was engraved by the printer U. Dove of Mysore, who presumably provided the attractive foliate curlicues, prancing horses and other standard Europeanized decoration. The other (perhaps later)

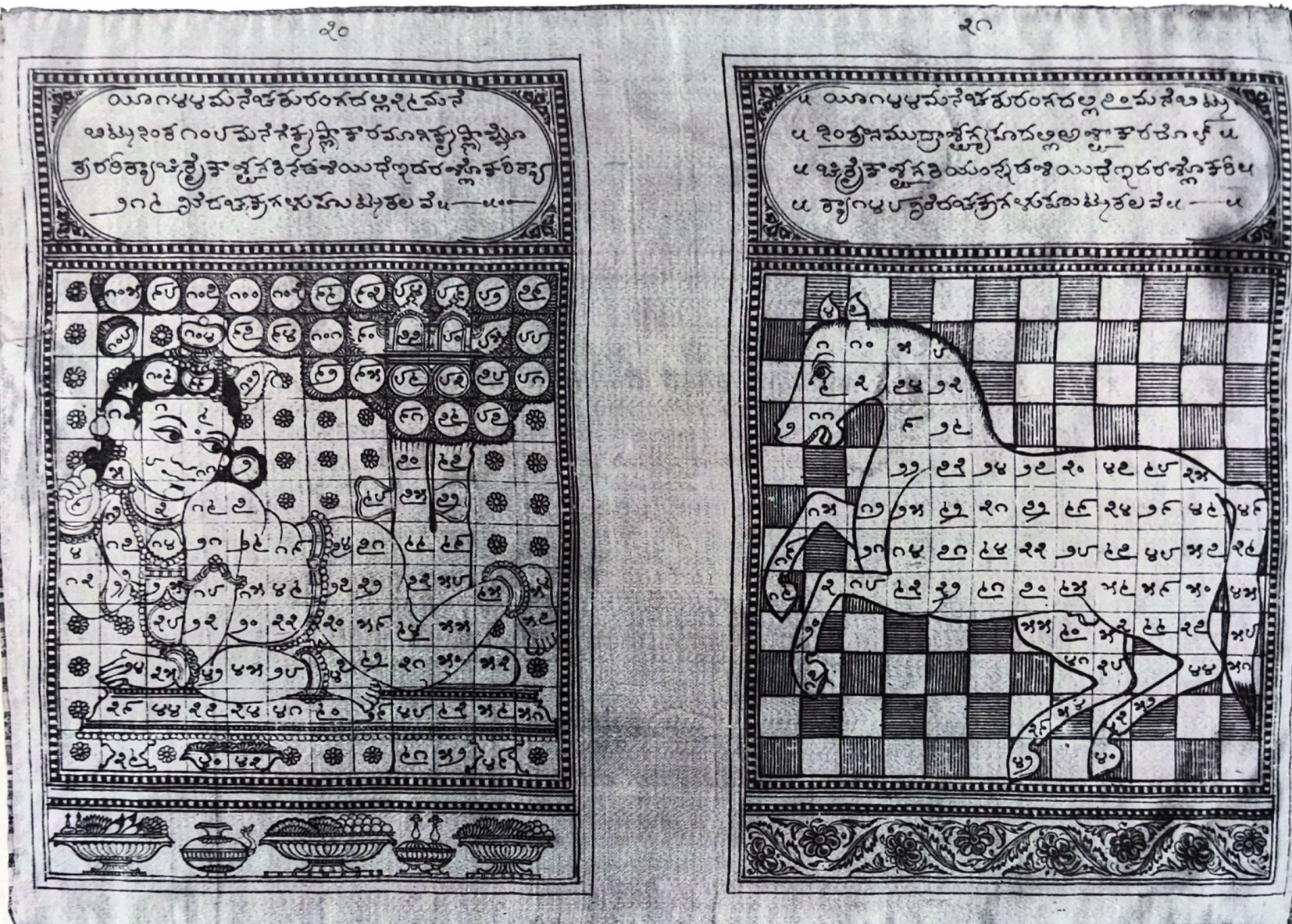


4. Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar's knight's tour magic square of 1852. Engraved and printed on paper by U. Dove, Mysore, 1852 or later. Approx. 30 x 21 cm. Present location unknown.

example was printed at the Ambavilas Palace press. Both commemorate the Raja's discovery on July 31, 1852 of his 8 x 8 semi-magic square formed by a re-entrant knight's tour.[9] In the accompanying text, he names this creation after the heavenly Wish-fulfilling Tree (*Purnatarakalpataru*). The Ambavilas version (see figure 5) even represents the chessboard within the branches of this auspicious mythical tree, growing from a type of *kumbha* or vase of plenty. The commentary enumerates a few of the remarkable numerical properties of this magic square.[10]



5. The Maharaja's knight's tour magic square as the cosmic Wish-fulfilling Tree. Printed on satin at Ambavilas Palace, Mysore, 1850s. Present location unknown.



6. Numerical puzzle diagrams with images of Balakrishna and a horse. Printed on yellow satin, probably at Ambavilas Palace, Mysore, 1850s. Present location unknown.

Within a few years, these knight's tour cloths gained some degree of circulation within India. Four examples were evidently shown at the Madras Exhibition of 1857: an entry in the Catalogue reads: "Goorrum Venkanna Sastrooloo, Exhibitor: 4 Chess Boards (Silk) of 64 squares showing consecutive moves of the Knight so as to cover each space once, and none twice. Rs. 35 each."[11] However, it seems to have taken nearly a century for the Maharaja's knight's tour discovery to reach the notice of Western chess and recreational mathematics circles. According to Murray, this occurred when a "contemporary silk handkerchief bearing this tour, ...ascribed to Maharajah Kistna Rajah Wodayer...," was exhibited in England in 1938 at the Margate Chess Congress.[12]

Another printed cloth from the same group represents not the magic square of 1852 but a typical pair of the Maharaja's mythological or devotional puzzles, based on the knight's tour or more obscure, cryptographic principles (figure 6). These examples yield images of the infant Krishna (one of the deities to whom the Raja was particularly devoted[13]) on a low throne beneath a tree, and the Raja's favourite emblematic motif of the horse (or chess knight). Such designs are, as usual, closely related to those found in the royal manuscript treatises or, in some cases, the Raja's engraved brass sheets, as in the examples at Mysore[14] or in the British Museum's collection (figure 1).[15] In this example, with its fourfold 12 x 12 grids, appear images of the south Indian philosopher Ramanuja (d. 1137), most prominent of the Shrivaishnava Acharyas or teachers; the type of *urdhvapundra* sectarian

forehead mark worn by the Shrivaishnavas; the monkey-god Hanuman, the helper of Vishnu in his incarnation as Rama; and Garuda, the vehicle and helper of Vishnu.

Games of karma: Shivasayujyam and Devisayujyam

Also in 1982, a remarkable double-sided Mysore games board, in rosewood inlaid with ivory, came to light in London (figures 7a–d).[16] This reversible, folding board bears alternative versions of a game based, like Snakes and Ladders, on the principle of karmic progress. The pairing of these games, known as Shivasayujyam and Devisayujyam ("Union with Shiva / the Devi"), reflects the complementary nature of Shiva as supreme god and the female Shakti as his active power.[17]

In the Shivasayujyam board (see figure 7a), the deity appears in *mukhalinga* form at the centre, with Nandi, Ganesha, and other deities. The six concentric circles leading to Shiva's heavenly realm contain numerous ivory roundel plaques, with images and inscriptions engraved and highlighted with lac. The Kannada inscriptions specify the rewards and retributions for good and evil actions, while the images represent the animal or other incarnations and the heaven or hell states which are the karmic results. The four players each have six pieces, whose starting squares are marked within lotuses at the corners of the board.

The Devisayujyam game on the reverse (see figures 7b–d) is dedicated to Chamundeshvari, tutelary goddess of the Mysore dynasty, whose temple on a hill

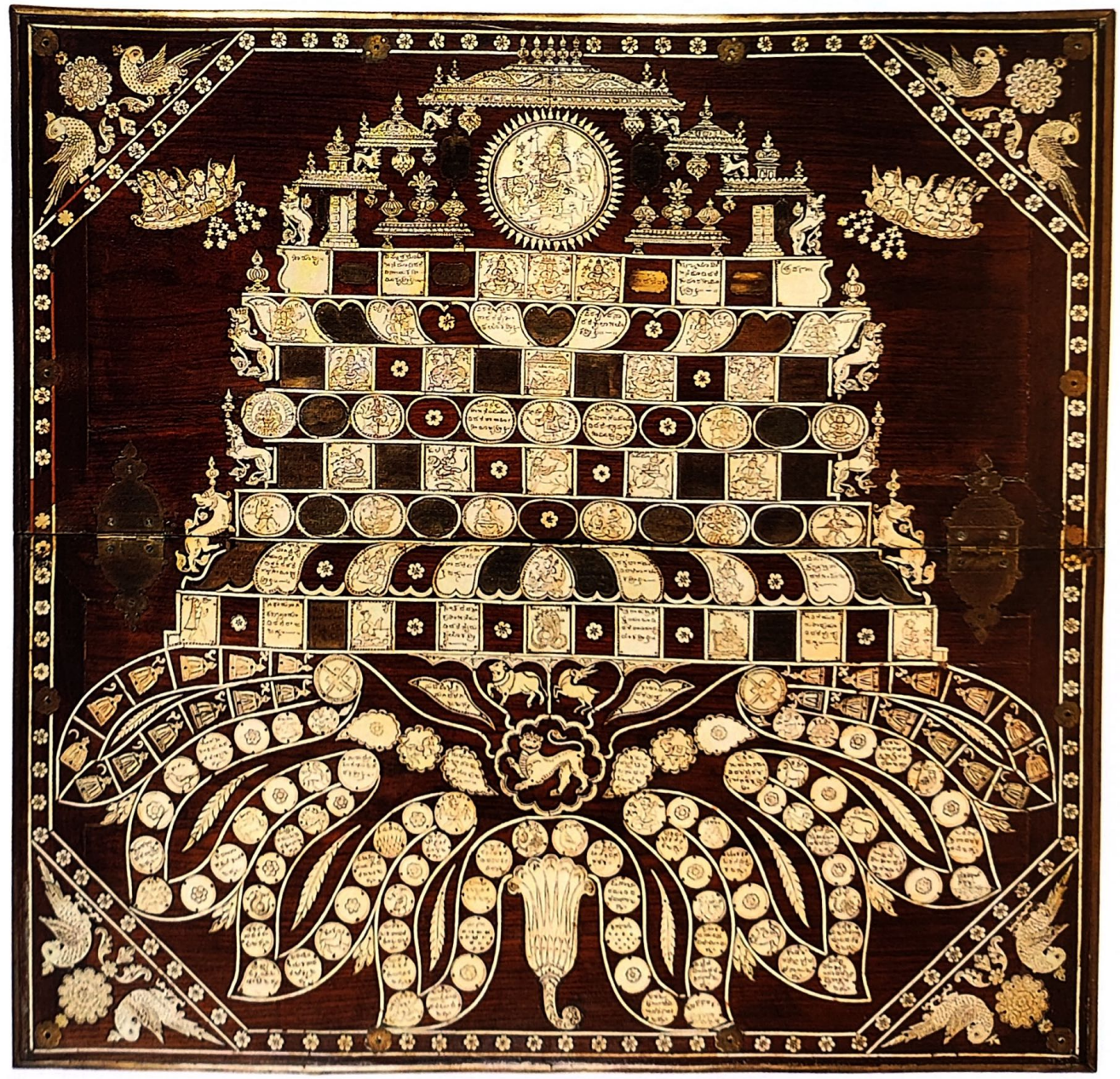
7a. Folding board for the karmic game of Shivasayujyam. Mysore, mid-19th century. Rosewood, with engraved ivory or brass inlaid plaques, and brass hinges; approx. 114 x 116 cm. Present location unknown.

overlooks the city. She appears above mounted on her lion, within a radiant ivory roundel (see figure 7c), and presides over an ornate, temple-like structure comprising eight storeys or rows of squares, which again bear karmic inscriptions and images. The earlier stages of this game take place within the base area of eight lotus petals below, the starting squares being marked within the two outermost petals.

Some characteristic square inscriptions found in this game (and in many cases, in the Shivasayujyam game also) are: "one who is cruel will be reborn as a tiger"; "one who is arrogant will be reborn as an elephant"; "one who indulges in pleasure will be reborn a prostitute"; or, on a more positive note, "one who performs many sacrifices will reach Indraloka (heaven of Indra)". Later in the game, the saving virtues of *bhakti* (devotion) are increasingly felt: a Vaishnava "will reach Vaikuntha (Vishnu's heaven)", while a Virashaiva "will reach Kailasa (the abode of Shiva)". Thus after various subordinate heavenly realms are passed, the successful player is united finally with the goddess Chamundeshvari herself.

A magic games box

One of the most ingenious of all surviving Mysore games boards is a composite games box in the Victoria and Albert Museum.[18] This games compendium, probably dating from the 1850s or '60s, is a *tour de force* both of wood and inlay work and of ludic inventiveness.[19] Its uppermost surface is a board for four-handed chess (figure 8a), the inlaid figures in the squares – as so often in

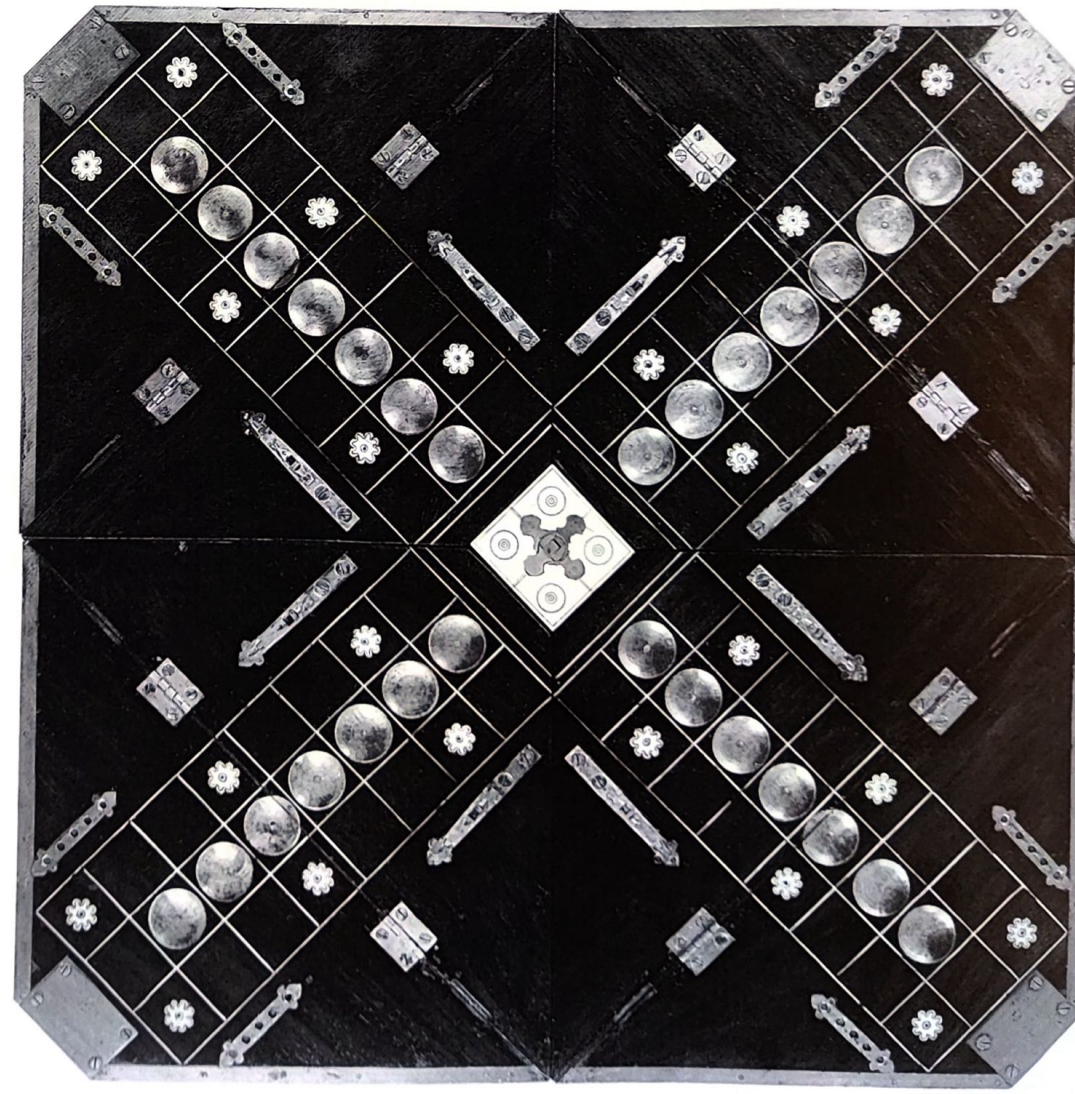


7b. Reverse of the board in figure 7a: the karmic game of Devisayujyam.

7c. Detail of figure 7b: the goddess Chamundeshvari presiding in glory.

7d. Central detail of figure 7b: ivory and brass inlaid squares with karmic inscriptions and images.

8a. Upper surface (for four-handed chess) of a complex folding box, forming a portable compendium of games. Mysore, 1850s–60s. Rosewood with engraved ivory inlays; 36 x 36 cm, height: 17.5 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

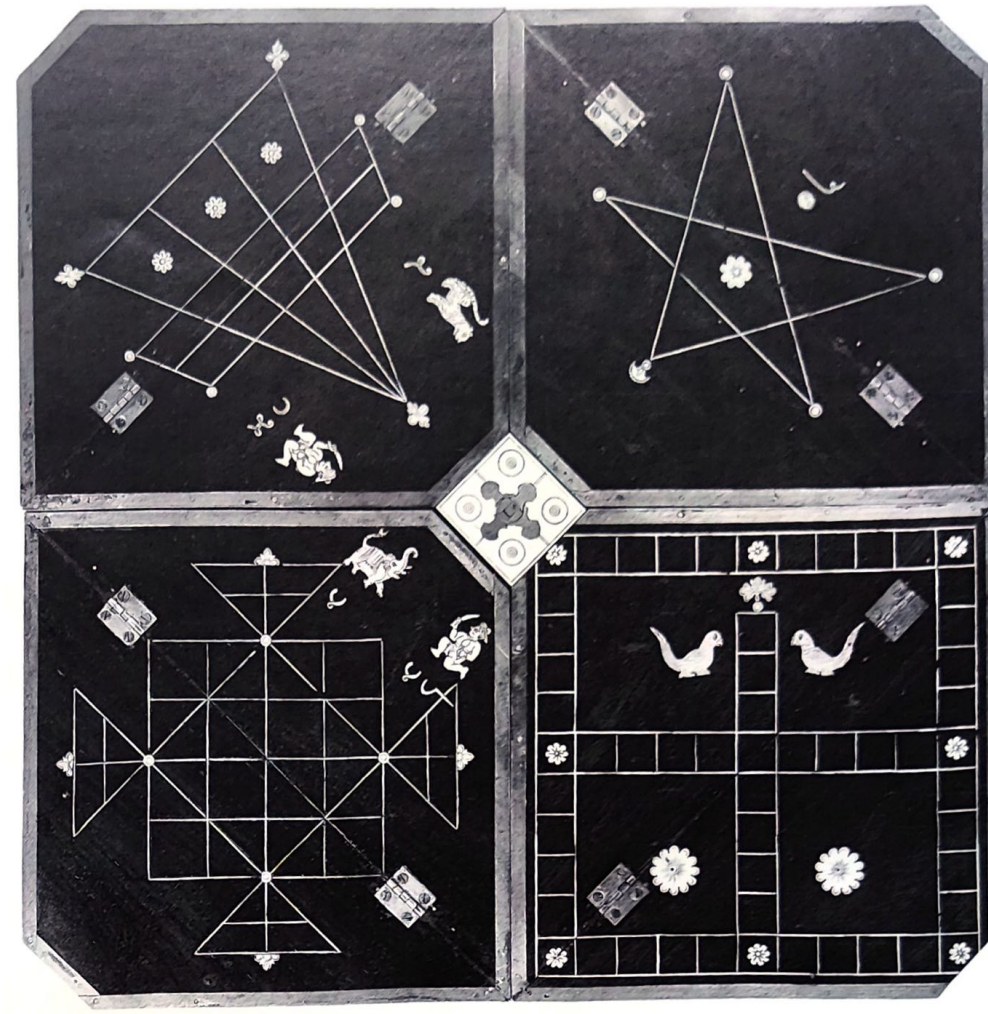


8b. Second level: hybrid type of chaupar.

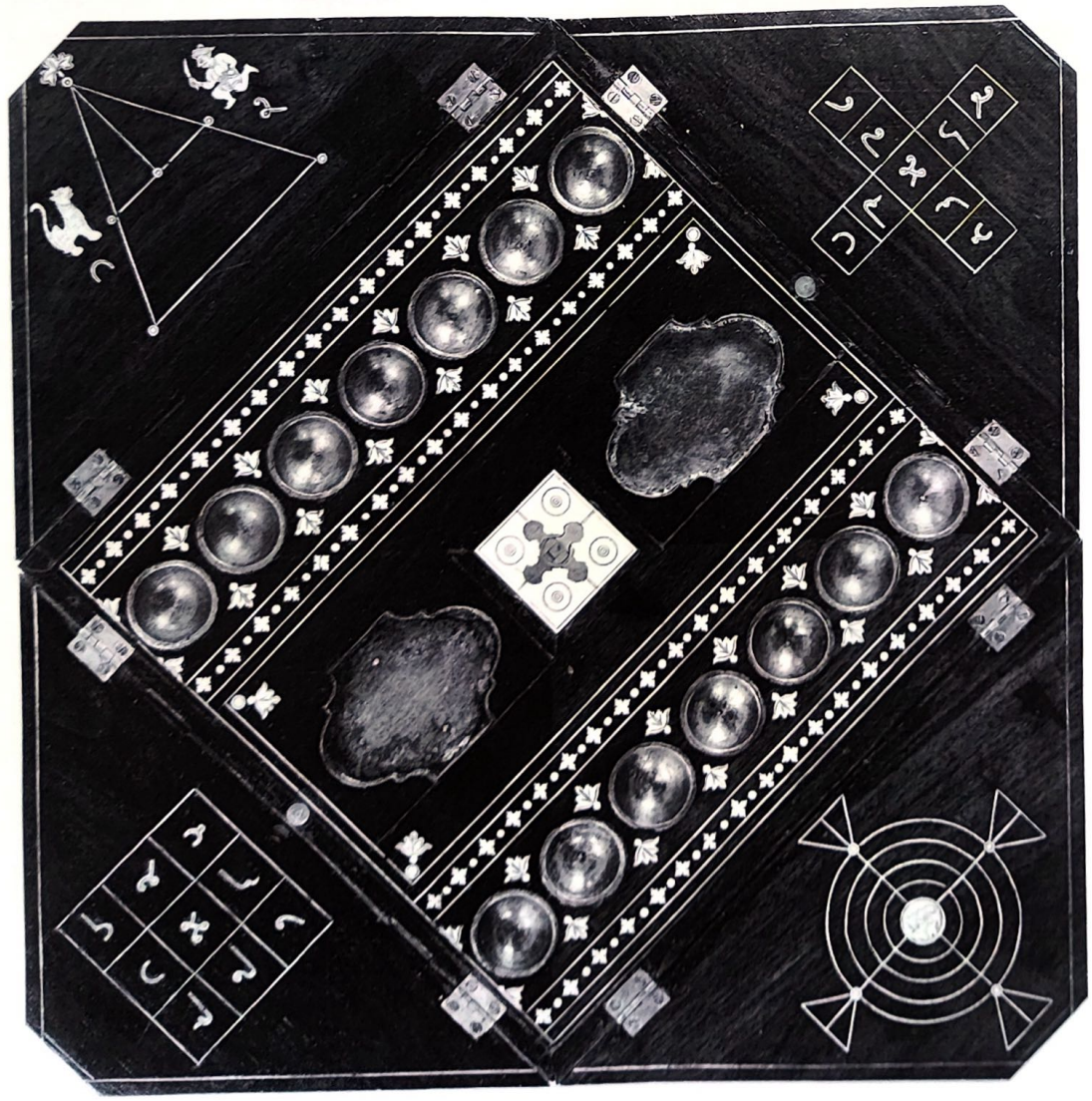
Mysore games boards – showing the initial positions of the pieces (elephants, horses, camels, ministers, rajas, pawns). By lifting successive tiers of triangular hinged panels, three lower levels are revealed, presenting further inlaid boards for: an unknown hybrid type of chaupar (figure 8b), in which shallow cups like those used in mancala are inset in the central rows of the four arms; four geometric hunt games (figure 8c); and finally, further hunt games and a magic square, grouped around the classic mancala game, known in south India as *pallanguli*[20] (figure 8d). Drawers on two sides of the box contain many of the original playing counters or pieces.[21]

These various games were presumably among the Raja's personal favourites in the latter part of his reign. Probably inspired by European models, this type of games compendium perhaps originated as a convenient way for the Raja to carry his games with him on tour. However this

example is known to have been sent to Europe within the Raja's lifetime, presumably with the royal consent, for display and sale at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867.[22] It was duly purchased by the former India Museum in London, for 122 rupees and 4 annas. If Krishnaraja learned of this acquisition before his death in the following year, one hopes he would have been pleased. A few years later, the compendium was among the collections transferred to the new Indian Museum in South Kensington, which became part of the Victoria and Albert Museum in the 1950s. The 1880 register entry describes it as a "Magic box for native games. Inlaid with ivory, containing coloured draughtsmen."[23] For long it remained an unseen curiosity in the depths of the V&A's basement store, but recently it has been more widely exhibited and its importance recognized in the extant corpus of Maharaja Krishnaraja's games.



8c. Third level: four hunt or race games.



8d. Fourth level: mancala or *pallanguli*.

NOTES

[1] B. Lewis Rice, *Mysore: A Gazetteer*, rev. ed., Westminster, 1897, vol. 1, p. 419. In c. 1801–04, the young raja sat for a portrait by the painter Thomas Hickey, now in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi: M. Archer, *India and British portraiture, 1775–1815*, London, 1979, pl. 146. For a mezzotint engraving of Krishnaraja of 1827 by S.W. Reynolds after A. Stuart, see M. Archer, "The people of India", in P. Rohatgi and P. Godrej, eds., *India: A pageant of prints*, Bombay: Marg, 1989, fig. 18.

[2] B. Lewis Rice, *Mysore*, p. 424: "While the Resident's advice was disregarded, a lute player named Venkat Subbaiya, and other indifferent characters, obtained an extraordinary influence over him."

[3] Ibid., p. 437; also S.K. Ramachandra Rao, ed., *Sri Tattva-Nidhi*, vol. 1, Hampi, 1993, pp. 3–5, noting that even this munificent purse "proved meagre for the Maharaja, whose interest in culture was enormous and unbridled".

[4] C. Hayavadana Rao, ed., *Mysore Gazetteer*, vol. II, part 4, Bangalore, 1930, p. 2965.

[5] Rangachar, "The Games and Puzzles of Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar", in the present volume. For other Mysore games boards, see S.R. Rao and B.V.K. Sastry, *Traditional paintings of Karnataka*, Bangalore, 1980, pl. 15; J.-M. Péchiné, *Roi des jeux, jeu des rois: Les Échecs*, Paris, 1997, illus. pp. 16–17.

[6] For an example of a Mysore karmic board in a London private collection, see I.L. Finkel, "A Raja's diversions: Board games at Mysore", in C. Mackenzie and I.L. Finkel, eds., *Asian games: The art of contest*, New York, 2004, pl. 11:4. Two further examples, printed on silk, are in the same collection. A contemporary, oval Mysore gaming table with a similar chaupar game is also reported in a Paris private collection.

[7] J. Forbes Watson and Sir J.W. Kaye, eds., *The People of India*, vol. 8, London, 1875, nos. 406–07 (text accompanying the two photographic portraits of Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III included in this monumental British Indian publication).

[8] I am grateful to my former V&A Museum colleague Veronica Murphy for bringing this group to my attention and for kindly making available her own research. The group, also including a further large game board diagram inscribed on paper, was later sold at Sotheby's, April 18, 1983, lot 209.

[9] Rangachar, "Games and puzzles", note 5, refers to the same knight's tour magic square; it features also among the several knight's tours of Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar ("an ardent devotee of Goddess Camunda") included in Pandit Harikrishna's *Kridakausalyam* MS of 1871, printed at Bombay in 1900, and republished in S.R. Iyer, ed. and tr., *Indian chess: as embodied in the Kridakausalyam of Pt. Harikrishna Sharma Jyotishacharya*, Delhi, 1982, pp. 29–43 (see verses at pp. 41–43, and Appendix, diagram no. 37). This magic square was later discovered in Europe by Francony in 1881, as noted by George Jelliss in his useful knight's tour website (http://www.ktn.freeuk.com/1d.htm).

[10] In both cases the full text (beneath a Mysore royal crest) reads: "The following Numerical Table in Chess has been invented by HIS HIGHNESS Maha Rajah Kristna Rajah Wodayer Bahauder Rajah of Mysore, on the 31st July 1852. On this board of 64 squares termed Poornataraculpaturroo the figures are placed according to the movements of the Knight, which give a total of 260 in 116 different ways, by adding the figures horizontally, perpendicularly, and in a variety of other ways, taking at a time 8 spaces that bear the same relative position to each other. It further rests with the ingenious to obtain the same singular numerical property on this board of 64 squares in which the Knight is made to move; for instance, 130 if 4 spaces, 260 if 8 spaces, 520 if 16 spaces, 1040 if 32 spaces, and 2080 if 64 spaces are added together."

[11] Cat. no. 9047 in the official catalogue (a copy is held in the V&A Museum).

[12] H.J.R. Murray, *The magic knight's tours: A mathematical recreation* (unpublished manuscript, 1951; Bodleian Library, Oxford), as cited by Jelliss in his knight's tour website (also with a reference to a printed cloth of this type seen for sale in London in 1947: *Fairy Chess Review*, vol. 6, April 1947, p. 84, letter from Major J. Akenhead).

[13] According to modern oral tradition at Mysore, the Raja "would lock himself up in the Krishna temple inside the Mysore Palace for many hours a day. Legend has that Krishna himself descended from heaven and played games with Wodeyar..." (newspaper article, *The Hindu*, November 14, 2004). The story somewhat recalls the case of the south Indian mathematical genius S. Ramanujan (1887–1920), who would hear the goddess Namagiri whispering new and beautiful equations to him.

[14] Rangachar, "Games and puzzles", fig. 5.

[15] Previously published, with two other examples from the British Museum's group of 23 brass sheets, in Finkel, "A Raja's diversions", pls. 11:3 (a–c).

[16] Then in a private collection in Britain; subsequently sold at Sotheby's, November 23, 1987, lot 395, with a provenance note: "Said by the late owner to have come from the Mysore Palace, as a gift from the Maharaja, in about 1875" (if the dating is accurate, this Maharaja would have been not Krishnaraja but his successor). Its present location is unknown. This board is also discussed in Topsfield, "Snakes and Ladders in India: Some further discoveries", *Artibus Asiae*, LXVI, 1, forthcoming.

[17] These games are also found in simplified forms in the Raja's *Chaturangasarasarvasva* manuscript of 1843, as well as in the later wall-paintings of the Jaganmohana Palace at Mysore: I am indebted to Vasantha Rangachar for this information.

[18] Illustrated with further discussion by Amin Jaffer, "The Furniture of Play", in this volume, figure 1.

[19] Another contemporary Mysore folding games compendium, in painted wood and comprising as many as twenty different games, is in a British private collection and awaits further study. I am grateful to Irving Finkel for this information and for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

[20] Of probable African origin (and sometimes called "the national game of Africa"), mancala remains popular in south India and Sri Lanka, as well as many other parts of the world: see e.g. H.J.R. Murray, *A history of board games other than chess*, Oxford, 1952, pp. 168–73; A.J. de Voogt, *Mancala board games*, London: British Museum, 1997, pp. 71–76.

[21] For fuller descriptions of the V&A games compendium, see A. Jaffer, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon: Catalogue of the collections in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum*, London, 2001, no. 25 (cat. entry by I.L. Finkel); and Finkel, "A Raja's diversions", pp. 132–33, fig. 11:5.

[22] *Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867*, 1867, p. 290: "Inlaid chess box" from Mysore in Group IV, Class XIV, as cited by Jaffer, *Furniture from British India*, p. 164.

[23] Victoria and Albert Museum: Indian Section 1880 Register, no. I.S. 06409.

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